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ON WRITING AND WRITERS

WORKS BY

The late SIR WALTER RALEIGH

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ON
WRITING AND WRITERS

BY

WALTER RALEIGH

BEING EXTRACTS FROM HIS NOTE-BOOKS,
SELECTED AND EDITED

BY

GEORGE GORDON

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First published, November 1926
Reprinted . March 1927

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE EDINBURGH PRESS, 9 AND 11 YOUNG STREET, EDINBURGH.

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PREFACE

Some eighteen months ago I was honoured by a request from Lady Raleigh that I should look through her husband's lecture notes, and extract from them whatever seemed recoverable and worthy of record. I have now done so, and this book is the result.

The notes, dispersed in many note-books, ranged from his first essays as a lecturer in the middle eighties to marginalia of the year 1914. I discarded, as he himself had done, everything earlier than 1895, and have extracted nothing which he disdained to repeat after 1900. Most of the lectures which he continued to deliver were drafted between the years 1898 and 1906, and it is from these that I have chiefly drawn.

Unless he contemplated publication it was not his practice to write a lecture out. His customary lectures were strictly oral, and his notes, for the most part, are memoranda for speech. But he was tempted now and then to put his thought into an aphorism, to elaborate an illustration, or to fix the outline of a situation or a character, and out of such windfalls and

scattered generosities this book has been made. Nothing that it contains was intended for publication, and the author of its contents had an exacting standard of what was fit to print. But the plan and form of the book, it may be hoped, preclude misunderstanding. These are remarks, observations, reflections—oral wisdom ; and not the least of their charms is that they preserve so often the informality of the *primus impetus*, of thoughts in their first dress.

Their various origins may be briefly described.

The earliest in date are the notes on " Letters and Letter-writers." This was a subject on which Raleigh at one time contemplated a book. He was asked, and agreed, in 1894, when his *English Novel* had appeared, to supply the " English Letter-writers " volume in Messrs Blackie's Warwick Library. In February 1898 he wrote that his MS. might be expected after the summer, and the book was accordingly advertised as in preparation. Other interests, however, continued to claim him, and in 1901 he begged to be excused. " It was very wrong of him, no doubt," writes Mr Walter Blackie, " but he did the wrong so gracefully that we forgave him."

The lectures on " Writing and Composition," from which some extracts are given, were shaped at Liverpool and Glasgow (*c.* 1896-1904). They were one of his favourite courses, and with a

spice of new examples from the periodical press were delivered occasionally at Oxford—for the last time in the Summer of 1921.

Of the two courses on nineteenth century topics here anthologised, the earlier, on Romanticism, dates from the summer and late autumn of 1904. "The thesis," he then wrote, "is that the seeds of subsequent extravagance and decay were in the early poets—indeed, the purpose is mainly anti-Romantic." These lectures were to contain his "real creed, up-to-date . . . the Classic creed, with trimmings." This, and the other course on Lamb, Hazlitt, and the rest, were combined for delivery at Cambridge in 1910-11, and were offered as alternatives when he was invited, in 1913, to lecture at the Sorbonne. "If you would accept," he wrote to M. Legouis, "four lectures on four names—*e.g.*, Lamb, Hazlitt, Landor, and another of that time, I could give them just after the New Year. If you would prefer something with a single thesis in it, I could lecture on "The Decline of Romance in English Poetry"—a sort of history of the English poetry of the nineteenth century . . . But for this I should need longer time. . . . The lectures on separate names would be better, I think, and less ambitious. I am never quite at ease when I get away from the live men. The general propositions are

better as *obiter dicta*." He followed his bent, choosing for his fourth "name" Jeffrey and the Periodical Reviewers. This lecture on the Reviewers was written later than the others, about 1910, just after the *Quarterly* centenary, and is preceded in his manuscript by what looks like a subsequent and detachable preface on Criticism. This preface I have taken the liberty of printing as a separate Note.

The observations on Chaucer, which conclude my list, demand a longer introduction. Much was expected from his lectures on this subject when they should come to be examined, for they were by general consent one of the best of his courses, and a book on Chaucer had been among his warmest designs. But the five well-filled note-books, though they reveal very clearly the method and temper of his treatment, are richer in reference and citation than in comment. I have recovered what I could, but am conscious that even the admirable and characteristic passages here printed will seem a disappointingly small salvage to those, more fortunate than myself, who heard him on this topic. A book on Chaucer was to have followed first his *Milton* (1900) and then his *Wordsworth* (1903), and he was engaged on it in the summer of 1903 when he was asked to write the *Shakespeare* volume in the English Men of Letters series. For a day

or two he hesitated: "If I take Shaks., I must chuck Chaucer (for the time)." His *Shakespeare* was published in 1907, and he talked of Chaucer once more, but the moment had gone by. Other projects intervened, the book languished, and in the end he decided that he did not know enough to write it. There were still too many unanswered questions about Chaucer which he was not, he felt, the man to answer. These unsettled preliminaries had troubled him from the first. "Chaucer," he wrote in 1903, "has got only so far that I have mapped out and defined a lot of things that I should like to know and don't. 'What the Philologists should tell us and don't'; 'What students of French poetry should tell us and don't'—these are hardly chapter titles." They are the private chapter titles of more than one unwritten book on Chaucer, nor can it well be otherwise while the tradition of his text remains uncertain. The kind of book on Chaucer that Raleigh would have liked to write does not exist, and is only faintly indicated by those that do. Perhaps he should have proceeded on what he had learned or could guess. There is no more striking passage in this collection than that in which he divines what Philology should tell us, and asserts, in the teeth of old opinion, the native-born ease and colloquial security of Chaucerian English. Raleigh

on Chaucer, all drawbacks notwithstanding, would have been so very much better than anything we have.

It was a branch of my duty to check the numerous, and for the most part unreferenced, quotations in these extracts. Some of them were evidently made from memory, and few had escaped that almost unconscious adaptation to the purpose in hand of which no lecturer is without experience. This lecturer had, in a remarkable degree, the kind of memory which he commends in Charles Lamb, a memory at once tenacious and creative. "Lamb knew pretty well what Dante would have said, and forgot that, in point of fact, Dante had not said it. He assimilated the authors he admired, so that they became bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, and underwent change with his own organic processes of thought." To interfere with nature is never a grateful task, and I cannot claim to have verified everything; I have done, in this matter, what I believe he would have done himself. The quotations in his published works are faithful to their originals, and so, I hope, are most of these.

GEORGE GORDON

OXFORD, *September* 1926

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ON WRITING AND WRITERS

I

ON WRITING AND COMPOSITION

The attempt to treat of Rhetoric or Composition is worth making, for the very difficulties of the subject are full of instruction. Perhaps the utmost benefit that can be looked for is a widening of the critical outlook, a deepened and strengthened distrust of all hard-and-fast standards, all short and easy systems for the mastery of English prose.

To write perfect prose is neither more nor less difficult than to lead a perfect life—indeed the Latins were not far out when they said that the one cannot be achieved without the other, that the good orator must be, in every sense of the word, a good man. A word is a deed, and problems of expression and conduct can never be wholly separated. The questions that arise in the study of English composition resolve themselves, with surprising frequency, into questions of character, motive, and conduct. Rhetoric passes into Ethic.

The width and complexity of either subject makes all formal teaching of it singularly inadequate. Both subjects range from the most comprehensive and magnificent principles to the most minute and detailed corrections of petty offences. Both, therefore, are apt to lose connection of parts, to fall into vagueness at the one end, and pusillanimity at the other. What instruction in conduct does any one of us find it easy to obtain? In the Churches or from the philosophers we learn great general principles—the Golden Rule. But the application is left to ourselves to make, with fear and trembling, on each of a thousand diverse occasions as it arises, and it is only when we have made the application for ourselves a thousand times that the general rule comes to have a vital meaning. On the other hand, a great part of conduct is under the control of small social sanctions—we are taught to take our places orderly in the cue at a booking-office, or not to eat peas with a knife. These things are sometimes of a piece with the general principles of conduct; sometimes they seem to have arisen accidentally or arbitrarily.

So it is with writing. Writing, to be good, requires a lively intelligence and sympathy, a well-stored mind and a feeling heart. It must be sincere, lucid, and vivacious. Agreed; but

when you sit down with a pen in your hand, that does not help you to even the first word on the desolate white expanse before you. And when you go to the teachers of composition, they cannot tell you what to say; they wait until you have said something unaided, and then they carp at it. They help you to a good style about as much as detectives help a thief to a good life. They lie in wait for the split infinitive, or the reporter's aorist, or the mixed metaphor, and leap out upon their young pupil just as he is warming to his work. They seem to have nothing to say themselves; they live by battening on those who have. Their pupil, when he has learned all that they can teach, is a prig with nothing to say.

All formal instruction in composition is apt, therefore, to fall into two disconnected parts. The first consists of wide general disquisitions on principles of thought and expression. This engaged most of the energies of the chief professors of Rhetoric in the 18th century. Thus Blair: "One of the most distinguished privileges which Providence has conferred upon mankind is the power of communicating their thoughts to one another. Destitute of this power, Reason would be solitary, and, in some

measure, an unavailing principle. Speech is the great instrument by which man becomes beneficial to man, and it is to the intercourse and transmission of thought, by means of speech, that we are chiefly indebted for their improvement of thought itself." So we are led on to consider Taste, Criticism, Genius, the Sublime in writing, and the Rise and Progress of Language.

The modern book on composition confines itself chiefly to the correction of errors, is a Museum of atrocities :

> Socrates, who was at one time a diligent scientific observer, then turned his back upon Nature to concentrate it upon Man.
>
> Some say the Duke is dead, others that he is alive ; for my part I believe neither.
>
> Have we an intuitive apprehension of the difference between right and wrong ; and if not, how do we come by it ?

There is a deal of curious and not unuseful work to be done by exercises of this kind. Practice in correction quickens the critical sense, and makes you pay regard to the build of English sentences. Ultimately you will find it impossible to read an ordinary newspaper leader without discovering mistakes, or pondering questions of diction and arrangement.

But this is the coldest part of the business. The most it can do is slightly to polish and improve your style, to make you more alert, and readier to adopt the attitude of the reader and to anticipate his difficulties. (So billiard instructors offer to improve your game 20 in the 100, but it is *your* game that they improve.) And all this castigation and correction leaves the heart of the matter untouched. It assumes the existence of a certain meritorious body of thought and purpose, to be dressed in neater fashion.

Words acquire and lose associations. We can determine only the particular usage for the particular purpose, at a particular time, and in a particular community. We cannot banish any colour from the palette, however raw and garish—a use will be found for it.

We must recognise the eternal process of change, and the freedom of speakers and writers. But this does not abolish nobility and aristocracy in words.

An old word or phrase may be more picturesque, more exactly expressive, but tact may reject it. The attitude of the world to language is not "literary." Men of business are not amateurs of language, and suspect those who

are. "Quaintness" paralyses a word for its immediate purpose. Try it. Suppose someone says, "I told him to go at once." Try him with "Went he?"—which is better than "Did he go?"

"As of old," "It behoves," "Perchance," smack of the pulpit, and the great trouble of the pulpit is that it is not often in touch with the pew.

Nothing can exaggerate the force of this instinct for sympathy between writer and reader. A very few words will destroy it. A school of young writers in a periodical revive the use of "Howbeit," write "'Tis" for "it is," and make use of plentiful subjunctives. They are regarded by the great reading public much as the gentleman in oriental costume is regarded by the street Arab.

The best player of any game is seldom the player who provides himself with the most elaborate array of instruments. A good player can play with anything. A good writer can get his effect in words known to every policeman.

The word of older usage does its work better, other things being equal. It is known to a wider circle, has an unchallenged and ancient

title, and does not distract the attention of the hearer or reader with a sense of shock or novelty. It has larger and more immediate associations. There is a "classic" English, and though it changes from age to age, it is more stable than the fashions of the spoken language. The community that uses it is a community of the living and the dead. It is good, if you can, to speak and write English that Shakespeare and Milton would have understood. You must admit words they did not know, but a good writer will prefer where it is possible to do his work with words that they did know.

The English which we are agreed to consider, and which we are to attempt to write, is not written for its own sake, but because a great part of the work of the world must be done with words. We are to write not to display our talents, or to tickle the sense with sounds, but to persuade, or convince, to inform, to commend our views or proposals to particular persons—in short, to influence the behaviour of our fellows.

The real question to be considered first is, not how shall you write, but why should you write at all. The answer to this question is often very unsatisfactory and inadequate.

It is in vain that we covet the merits of

Captain Walton's letter, dated on board the *Canterbury*, off Syracuse, August 16, 1718.

> Sir,—We have taken and destroyed all the Spanish ships and vessels which were upon the coast, the number as per margin.
>
> I am, etc.,
>
> G. Walton.

What chance has a Prize Poem or Essay (on a set subject) to convey a condensed significance like that ?

One single principle is involved—immediacy and efficiency of appeal Language is a means of communication. It has work to do. Friction in a machine, opacity in a medium, is bad. The highest success in a speech, a letter, a sermon, is a demonstration that no attention is arrested by the words or the literary art. The merest touch of quaintness, affectation, eccentricity, literary pretence, cuts off sympathy. The social sense is extraordinarily sensitive to this.

This social standard is not universal in its authority—it will not control lyric poetry and romance—but it is the standard of Classic English of any age. The strong vivid slang word cannot be counted on to do its work. It sets the hearer thinking, not on the subject of my speech, but on such irrelevant questions as

the nature of my past education or the company I keep. Often a slang word or a common proverb is the best and strongest expression possible. If so, it may be used, but it is commonly introduced with something of a formal apology, and special commendation, so as to avoid all risk of breach of sympathy. For example, Swinburne on Desdemona: "Between Iago and Othello the position of Desdemona is precisely that defined with such quaint sublimity of fancy in the old English byword, 'between the devil and the deep sea.'" This is not good.

The merit of writing depends first of all on the motive, the background of fact, the situation that governs the composition. From failure to recognise the all-importance of the *situation*, rhetoricians have made too much of expression.

There are few occasions for eloquence. The common mistake is that an eloquent man can be eloquent on anything, at any time, can write beautifully on a broomstick, like Dean Swift. Eloquence demands the right audience, a great theme, and a practical issue. You may see the speaker gesticulating and hear his rhapsody, but remain cold. This is the most fatal thing that can happen to a speaker—he becomes absurd, like a man seen dancing when you do not hear

the music. Hence the importance of determining how much passion the situation will warrant, and allowing yourself somewhat less.

Every excess is a weakness and you are sure to be found out. There is almost always a practical bearing. The worst of asserting

> Were the whole world of Nature mine
> That were a present far too small

is that a collection may presently be taken up, and you give an exact and humble value to your words—at most, half a crown.

Many a book dull to read was exciting to write.

Beginning to write too soon is a common cause of difficulty. Let the subject take shape and gather in thought. Every man is eloquent on what he knows.

Dr Johnson wrote Dr Dodd's "The Convict's Address to his Unhappy Brethren." Mr Seward expressed a doubt whether it was Dodd's, because it had more force of mind than anything known to be his. Johnson said, "Depend upon it, sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." Thinking for your life is good thinking.

The thing to aim at in ordinary prose is the Middle Diction. The writers best to learn from

for ordinary purposes are Swift, Defoe, Steele, Addison, Hazlitt, Newman, rather than Bacon, Burton, Jeremy Taylor, Lamb, Carlyle, Pater.

It is by *using* a word that you learn it. Every one knows hundreds of words that he has never used. You must write or speak to learn to write or speak.

Incorrect grammar is almost always less intelligible, but there are many cases where the absolute grammatical rule is not really im portant, because the breach of it does not interfere with clearness. The general rule that governs these usages in the best English authors is a rule of thought, not of grammar. One could make a little handbook of grammatical " errors " in the best authors.

The Double Negative.—This old construction is found in Lamb, and later. It is needed for emphasis.

E.g., " There's nothing not so difficult, not to drive, when there's a many on 'em, very, isn't a pig."

How can anyone pretend to get the force of this by " There's nothing so difficult to drive as a herd of pigs."

Each clause comes as a circumstance of added

difficulty. There is passion in the multiplied negative. "Very," a word of genius, is the pinnacle of distress. And the changing to the singular is essential. The subject isn't a herd of pigs, it is *the Pig*—the unchanging soul of the pig. The greatest truth concerning him is expressed by a negative. He will not, does not, indeed *is not* in relation to any practicable course.

This is the age of the School Board. Correct speech is aimed at, and judged, not by idiom, but by chop-logic. So fine elastic idioms fall out: "The king's Son of Heaven," "the Bailiff's daughter of Islington."

From ignorance we get "clearly," "loudly," "fairly" (as in "spoke him fair"), and shall soon have "sing highly, sing lowly." So also, a house *to be let*, the fog is *being lifted*, etc. These cheese-paring, hair-splitting, one-trunk-inheriting grammaticasters will go all lengths. Why *Drinking-water*, or *This won't wash?*

Warburton's emendation of *Hamlet* ("being a God kissing carrion") is due to failure to understand English idiom. May we say, *The kettle boils*, or *He was addicted to the bottle?*

How shall a writer allude to himself when introducing personal impressions, opinions, etc.?

(1) The Editorial "We." "We remember seeing Canning when a boy." This "We" is fitted only for expressing corporate policy.

(2) The vague "One." "One likes to have some sauce with one's meat" (American usage —"*his* meat"). This means either "I like," or "All men like." The first is unimportant, the second untrue. "One" is used to attain a kind of non-committal universality and dignity.

(3) The mannered "You." This is apt to be hectoring or unduly familiar. "You shall find no better piece of prose," is hectoring. This other is familiar: "He (Mr H. B. Irving) has learned the art of standing still, which Mr Brough has told us is the most difficult art of all; and *you* carried away from the theatre a memory of an easy moderation and a wise restraint." (*Outlook*, April 8, 1905.) "Mr Brough," the resentful reader may say, "has told me nothing; I have not hung on his lips. And I was not at the theatre, and perhaps do not mean to go."

"You" and "Us" are really another form of the vain attempt to escape from the insignificance of "I." There are two good ways: "I" for personal impressions; or, make your statements general and run the legitimate risk of error.

Ordinary writing is full of these protective disguises, some of them ridiculous enough. For instance, "The present writer," used by the *Spectator*, or "humanly speaking," in case the reader should think you are speaking in a divine capacity. "Personally, I am of opinion," suggests that you have two sets of opinions, one subject to all the weaknesses that attend personal convictions and impressions, the other universally valid.

The remedy here is thought. State your own views generally. If you are known to be the writer, no one will mistake you for the Pope; if the utterance is anonymous, it will be judged by its own force and truth.

To use words well you must know them as you know persons. We have an enormous choice, *e.g.*, Ancient Mariner, Old Sailor, Elderly Seaman, Decrepit Shell-back, Superannuated Marine, Aged Salt, Senile Tar, Veteran Navigator. All these have shades of meaning.

Saxon is not strong in abstract and general ideas, which do not stir our emotions as they do those of the Latin races. For instance, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" would never make a revolution here. The Saxon equivalents, "Freedom" and "Brotherhood," are much

more concrete, hardly ideas. Freedom is being let alone. Brotherhood is a fact of kinship. Equality has no Saxon expression, it is too abstract; it would never occur to one looking at men. What you *love* is Saxon, Latin is merely *amiable*.

There is an old story how when fur-tippets became fashionable (for ladies) the fashion was arrested for the time by one genius who dressed her coachman and groom in them. That is how words go out, by social repulsion.

Talk loses all air of freedom if it is too precise. Better the wrong phrase impromptu than the right with forethought. An easy speaker, thinking while he talks and trying hither and thither, enables the listener to join in the pleasures of the chase, which are more exciting, if not nobler, than the pleasures of the table.

Imperfect acquaintance with the Latin element in English is the cause of much diffuse writing and mixed metaphor. If you talk nonsense in Saxon you are found out at once; you have a competent judge in every hearer. But put it into Latin and the nonsense masquerades as profundity of abstract thought. Half the writing in the newspapers is of this kind. On the subject of the Navy and the two schools of defence, *The*

Times (May 1905) explains the possibility of a compromise between extreme opinions, and goes on: "To these middle views we may have occasion to return, as it is quite possible they may contain the germs of a solution which would reconcile the more conflicting opinions."

Put this into Saxon and the nonsense is evident. Opinions contain "seeds"; from seeds you get a "melting" or "loosening"; the melting "calls together" the "fighters" from opposing sides; and these fighters are again opinions—though not the same opinions that contained seeds. Any one of these metaphors would be enough to express the idea.

It would be pedantry to allow no mixed metaphor in the Latin vocabulary, which consists largely of words whose metaphorical sense is dead or dying. But a vigorous and clear writer will not do much of his building with this rotten material of half-decayed metaphor.

Writing of this kind is common because it is very diffuse and bulky, so that it enables you to dress up a poor little commonplace thought in flowing apparel. (This is what is meant by "penny-a-liner." The public is thirsty for information, but it does not want to read anything that goes to the head). Also because it is vague and commits the writer to nothing very

definite. Muddled thought and intellectual timidity take refuge in the intricacies of the Latin vocabulary and bury themselves under its decaying matter.

From *The Times*, August 19, 1902.

[The Emperor Francis Joseph.]

Vienna, *Aug.* 18*th.*

It may be fairly said that in celebrating the seventy-second birthday of the Emperor-King to-day, the different nationalities and creeds of the Dual Monarchy have never been more profoundly conscious of their indebtedness to that high-minded and sagacious sovereign, who constitutes the great binding link that counteracts the disruptive force of their conflicting interests and aspirations. The Emperor Francis Joseph succeeded at an early age in acquiring the deep personal attachment of his subjects. In the course of time this feeling was enriched through the sympathy aroused by his participation in the national misfortunes and by his terrible family afflictions. In recent years this feeling has been further strengthened by the sense of what the Monarchy owes to his statesmanlike sagacity and the powerful influence which he exercises as a mediator, and by the apprehension as to what may happen when these are withdrawn. The circumstance that the peoples of the Monarchy owe to him the solution of many difficulties which baffled his councillors has inspired them with a lively gratitude which enhances the admiration and attachment excited by his elevated character and exemplary devotion to duty.

This cannot be corrected in detail; it would have to be rewritten. A good writer is like a good draughtsman—uses few, decisive, lines. If you do not know anatomy, your drawing is woolly.

The fact is, that metaphors wear out. "The thin edge of the wedge" is worn off. From familiarity, the mind skips over the figure and takes a short-cut to the meaning. "Rooted prejudice," "unbridled passion," "shallow fears," "inflamed with anger." The figure is neglected, as you neglect, on a second reading, the illustrations of a book.

To prevent this the speaker or writer must show that he conceives the figure vividly himself. Even so he will not excite his audience to thought if they are convinced that they know all about it. Besides appropriateness, some novelty is necessary to excite attention and set the mind at work for itself. Fortunately, "the world is so full of a number of things" that metaphor will not fail. The essential is that the metaphors you use shall be exciting to yourself, have some warrant in real experience.

The main thing is not the analogy, but the suggested atmosphere. And again it is the thinking done by the audience that matters, and they are on the watch for implications.

Consider exactly and carefully the value of words.

"Constitutes," "Forms." Say "Is."

"Render." Say "Make."

"Theory." Say "opinion," except where *theory* is needed. "Virchow had a deeply-rooted aversion to all kinds of theories, for he credited nothing that could not be definitely proved." Read "Opinions."

"Ideal." The word is seldom needed. "Canon Lyttleton's record is in many ways such as to render him an ideal occupant of the post."—*Spectator* (April, 1905). Say "Good."

Avoid non-committal words, "Interesting," for example. The old equivalent was "taking," "captivating," "amusing."—"This constitutes," you say, "a leading feature in the situation, and a consideration of it cannot fail to prove highly interesting." All which is just nothing—better to spend the time in clearing your throat, or twiddling your thumbs.

The verbose style means an uneducated mind. The memory supplies things in the order in which they happened, with all detail. The power of suppressing the irrelevant is of rare attainment, and a writer's business.

Verbosity is not curable by omission: it is a

fatty degeneration of expression. Ben Jonson gives an instance: "I came to the stairs, I took a pair of oars, they launched out, rowed apace, I landed at the Court Gate, I paid my fare, went up to the presence, asked for my Lord, I was admitted." All this (says Jonson) is but "I went to the Court and spake with my Lord."

Most speakers and writers have no use for more than a small percentage of the meaning of words. They cannot use the wealth of the language.

The use of adjectives and the use of figure are perhaps the two chief rhetorical weapons. But figure implies, while the adjective dictates opinion.

None of Macaulay's most amiable qualities are reflected in his way of writing. He wrote nonsense for his nieces, as an escape from the inhumanity of his public style.

Burke's style is nearly adequate to express the man and all his interests. He kept nothing out of literature. Some famous and characteristic styles keep much out: Gibbon's, for example, Carlyle's, Pater's. Burke's is a greater prose than any of these.

The art of writing cannot be learnt by a close study of Burke's rhetoric. The flowers and fruits of style grow on the tree of character. The attempt to imitate Burke has nevertheless been made. One whole nation, the Bengalis, mimic his speech. The effect is exactly like what may sometimes be seen in the branches of the trees of an Indian forest—the monkeys are behaving in a strange and unnatural manner, a manner that is quite unintelligible until the cause is discovered. A man has passed that way.

When we are struck by some idea in a great poet or writer we often say, " It is exactly what I have often thought myself." As Emerson puts it : " In every work of genius we recognise our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty."

Our thoughts become majestic in the hands of a great writer and are preserved by the great antiseptic—style.

Pope was not the first to discover that happiness attends virtue, that extremes should be avoided, or that life may be led honourably in any station; but he gave polish and point to them in the English tongue. A platitude is a truth spoken by someone who does not feel it.

Pedantry is the fault of all those who mistake the means for the end. A language is a key to a new cabinet of thought—we ought not to be so interested in the wards of the key as to forget to open the lock with it.

Jokes, separate jokes, retailed for joking's sake, are husky things at best and bear no relation to humour. Joking is little better than a bad habit—humour is an atmosphere and a light that bathes the whole of human life. The greatest humorists have been no jokers.

The main virtue of all good Literature is its sincerity. Public etiquette, policy, "tickling commodity" make much journalistic language insincere.

The danger of all insincere writing is that it is liable to confuse the mind. Insincere speech leads to insincere thought, and those who begin by duping others end by duping themselves.

II

ON LETTERS AND LETTER-WRITERS

THE simplest form of literature is the letter. Besides being simple the letter is the most general form of literature, practised to-day by millions of writers who have experimented in no other kind. An Epic or a system of philosophy is still attempted by very few of the human species, and a large, though diminishing, number of educated men and women end their lives without having written a novel or a sonnet. But we all practise letter-writing, and if this be really a form of literature we should all have our place in a dictionary of English authors.

The writing of letters is only one of the forms of social intercourse in its widest sense. We may talk to a tradesman across the counter or we may send him a letter; we may shake hands with a friend, or finding it impossible to meet him, we may write to him. Many letters express exactly what a shake of the hand would express; what, if we were together, we should

express by silence. In letters of this kind it is a familiar experience that there is nothing to say. The whole gist is in the beginning and the end: "Dear Blank, I remain sincerely yours;" the rest is superfluous and a tribute paid to usage.

The letter, therefore, is not a literary form with a set of rules proper to itself. There is no *art of letter-writing*. Letters are a part of the social machinery, by means of which persons are put in relation with one another. A complete treatise on letter-writing would be a treatise on all the personal and social ties of man; and a history of letter-writing would involve in its enormous scope a full account of the lives, habits, and feelings of all who have wielded a pen.

The chief interest of a study of the great letter-writers, is that it introduces us not to literary works, but to persons. In their pages we find their portraits. This is the triumph of letter-writing, that it keeps a more delicate image alive and presents us with a subtler likeness of the writer than we can find in the more formal achievements of authorship. The writer has left us not his arguments and opinions but himself. The only art that he has practised is

the art of being himself. He has not consciously followed any models or observed any rules. Who would not recoil from the absurdity of addressing Charles Lamb, when he took pen in hand to write to a friend, with the reminder that a letter must be either "Narratory," "Consolatory," "Objurgatory," "Monitory," or "Congratulatory," and that the right epistolary style should be a studied mean between the formal dignity of an oration or discourse and the triviality of everyday conversation?

The great letter-writers, then, attract us as our friends attract us, quite independently of literary criticism, or the march of mind. But with what difficulty, how seldom and how hardly, does man attain to self-expression! After what long struggles, and with what imperfections, does he succeed in relating himself to paper! How eagerly or stubbornly does he hide himself behind creeds, mathematical propositions, and abstractions! To succeed in this task is to be immortal, as Montaigne and Samuel Pepys bear witness. These men devised their own literary garments in the privacy of their closets, and remain rare examples of the human mind perfectly fitted with expression. The ruck of common mortals who write letters must be

content with something less, with a savour of idiosyncrasy imparted to the forms current in their age, a faint suggestion of personality in the way they wear their ready-made or second-hand clothes.

For in letter-writing, as in matters of the toilet, no one is free to please himself, and in both, genius is shown in those slight adaptations and delicate differences that transform the common mode into an appropriate garb for the individual mind or body. But modes also vary, and although the thing has never been done, I venture to think that there is a real interest in the tracing of dominant fashions of expression. The letter of a fine letter-writer is an index to the study of personality, but the most ordinary unskilled letter dashed off in a hurry, observing all the common forms of the day, though it may, and generally does, tell us little enough about the writer, is an index to something else. It may be taken as a basis for the study of the changing fashions of social intercourse and the various modes of expression that have prevailed in our relations with our fellows.

In short, a fine letter is like a perfectly dressed person—the clothing only emphasises the personality of its wearer; but the everyday missive, polite or business-like, of an age, is like

a fashion-plate, and has the same interest in the story of human modes.

The letter-writer's audience is one person, selected by himself, known to him, sympathetic with him. He shows an absolute want of tact, and neglects his opportunity if he communicates only such matter as might be equally well conveyed by Reuter's Agency or shouted into the great flapping ear of the reading public.

This excludes from our consideration all "letters which are not letters"—Letters to the People of England, Letters to a Government, Junius's Letters, Goldsmith's letters from a Chinese philosopher, etc. These are essays, orations. The remarks made in them are made for the purpose of being overheard. The perfect letter-writer addresses himself to one person, and it is worth noting that the poet Cowper more than once requests his correspondents to burn his letters: their work was done.

A letter must be personal; but it may be too personal. The subject must be taken up, thrown this way and that, exhibited alternately in a general and personal light. Like a coin, the face of a letter reveals in whose name it was minted, while the obverse is given over to some more general design.

It was the Roman Empire that gave us some of the earliest and best letter-writers, whose influence has been strong on all modern practice. The citizen of the Greek City State had little occasion to write letters. His life was passed in daily converse with his fellow citizens. Each city was a little world, and official communication between them was of the nature of an embassy from one planet to another. In the later years of the Roman Republic, on the other hand, and the earlier years of the Empire, all the conditions for good letter-writing existed.

A centre of society and government is needed for the best letter-writing: Cicero's Rome, Mme de Sévigné's Paris. Even the delights of the country and retirement are felt and described best by those who have known the town, the Court, and active life.

If we go back to the earliest period of English history that has bequeathed us any collections of letters we find the conditions for good letter-writing absent. The *Paston Letters* are interesting as historical documents, but they cannot be commended as letters. The range of interest is too small: practical household matters, or the narration of public events. They have no

trace of the thousand trifles that preoccupy a *society*. The writers, also, had not the literary habit whereby it becomes easy to relate oneself to paper. To compare these with good modern letters is to realise how our literary soil has been fertilised by the trees that grow in it.

The letters that have come down to us from the 15th or early 16th century are mostly State documents. They are penned like English statutes, where a multitude of words darkens speech. The letters, on the other hand, of the English scholars of the early Renaissance are exercises, an opportunity for grave apophthegms and pious reflections. Many of the private letters of that age are generic rather than personal, repositories of appropriate sayings and reflections. The scholars who wrote them aimed at model letters, and because they keep to the eternal truths their letters have lost vitality.

The majority of the Elizabethans wrote no letters save on the set occasions of life. The small educated class found models in the classics, and for the large uneducated class native models were soon supplied. Translations of classical letters were published, and in 1586 appeared *The English Secretary* by Angell Day—one of the first collections of English letters—all artificial.

Here one learns what a portentous business we undertake when we write to a friend. Letters are classified according to their aims and objects, and the parts of a letter are industriously set forth: the Salutation, the Exordium, The Narration or Proposition, the Confirmation, the Confutation, The Peroration, the Subscription. In this book we can find what the age admired. Angell Day was a man of letters, and a translator of some note. His Epistle Amatory for the First Entreaty of Good Will might have served as a model for Hamlet's exordium, "To the Celestial, and my Soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia," or for Don Armado's letter to Jaquenetta. She refuses him, and wishes him better fortune elsewhere. He replies: "Gracious object of my pleasing thought, and mistress of all my inward happiness, sweet were the lines you wrote, God wot unto me your servant how comfortable and how precious, knowing that the premeditation had issue from those your peerless excellencies, and the touch of their letters passed the guidance of your delicate hands, how sharp or powerful so ever be the weight of the same, the less shall be the grief, in that she whom I honour and estimate above all others hath vouchsafed to wish unto my lot the accomplishment of all those excellencies which none but herself can paragonise,

and wherein she only goeth beyond all others." That is,—" very kind I'm sure."

The Elizabethan age, that age of Euphuism and Arcadianism, has left us hardly an example of a good familiar letter written by a professed literary man. No doubt some were written, under the pressure of hard circumstance, simple and direct enough, such as the letter to his wife attributed to the dying Greene: " Doll, I charge thee by the love of our youth, and by my soul's rest, that thou wilt see this man paid, for if he and his wife had not succoured me, I had died in the streets."

But when educated men wrote at leisure, on the topics of the day, a kind of literary elephantiasis seized upon them, their matter swelled to enormous dimensions, and was buried in far-fetched decoration and verbosity.

Some of the best letters of that time were written by Sir John Harington to his wife and friends about his fortunes at court. When he came home with Essex from the disastrous expedition to Ireland he thus described the Queen's anxiety and annoyance :—

" In good sooth I feared her Majesty more then the rebel Tyrone, and wished I had never received my Lord of Essex's honour of Knight-

hood. She is quite disfavoured and unattired, and these troubles waste her much. She disregardeth every costly cover that cometh to the table and taketh little but manchet and succory pottage. Every new message from the city doth disturb her, and she frowns on all the ladies. I had a sharp message from her brought by my Lord Buckhurst, namely thus, 'Go tell that witty fellow, my godson, to get home; it is no season now to fool it here.' I liked this as little as she doth my knighthood, so took to my boots, and returned to the plow in bad weather. I must not say much, even by this trusty and sure messenger; but the many evil plots and designs have overcome all her Highness' sweet temper. She walks much in her privy chamber, and stamps with her feet at ill news, and thrusts her rusty sword at times into the arras in great rage. My Lord Buckhurst is much with her, and few else since the city business; but the dangers are over, and yet she always keeps a sword by her table."

Some years later he gives an equally vivid account of an interview with King James :—

"He enquired much of learning, and showed me his own in such sort as made me remember my examiner at Cambridge aforetime. He sought much to know my advances in philosophy,

and uttered profound sentences of Aristotle, and such-like writers, which I had never read, and which some are bold enough to say others do not understand, but this I must pass by . . . . His Highness told me [the Queen his mother's] death was visible in Scotland before it did really happen, being, as he said, 'spoken of in secret by those whose power of sight presented to them a bloody head dancing in the air.' He then did remark much on this gift, and said he had sought out of certain books a sure way to attain knowledge of future chances. Hereat, he named many books, which I did not know, nor by whom written, but advised me not to consult some authors which would lead me to evil consultations . . . . I did forget to tell, that his Majesty much asked concerning my opinion of the new weed tobacco, and said it would, by its use, infuse ill qualities on the brain, . . . and wished it forbidden."

It is not without significance that Sir John Harington, who has left us these and many other witty and familiar letters, was a kind of Court jester, licensed to use free speech at the Court by favour of the Queen, his godmother. He was a wit and a poet, a gentleman who wrote without formality or fear, and so his letters are among the earliest that attain to the

chief virtues of letter-writing—spontaneity and ease.

In the seventeenth century our English letter-writers make a poor show beside the splendid array that enriched the literature of France. There were many reasons for this. Our Court life was less influential, and Court society was broken and distracted by the civil troubles. Literary society (which seldom produces the best letters) was for a great part of the century given over to fashionable affectations. The people, on the other hand, were only in course of being educated to the point at which written expression becomes natural.

What may be called the "Courtly" or "Cavalier" style began with men of letters and rapidly degenerated into formula.

Note the studied extravagance of manner in Donne's letters:—"And as wheresoever these leaves fall, the root is in my heart, so shall they, as that sucks good affections towards you there, have ever true impressions thereof. Thus much information is in very leaves, that they can tell what the tree is, and these can tell you I am a friend and an honest man. Of what general use the fruit should speak, and I have none; and of what particular profit to you,

your application and experimenting should tell you, and you can make none of such a nothing; yet even of barren Sycamores, such as I, there were use, if either any light flashings, or scorching vehemencies, or sudden showers made you need so shadowy an example or remembrancer."

He gnaws a figure as a dog does a bone. Letters are leaves, himself the tree, his heart the root, actions the fruit.

This forced metaphorical vein, which we tolerate in a great man because of the occasional flashes of genius that may illumine it, becomes rapidly intolerable as a common fashion. It is very generally found in the polite letters of the 17th century. Even the most famous letter-writer of that time, James Howell, has not a little of it.

James Howell is the author of a multitude of books, but he is remembered only for his letters. He has been called the Father of Epistolary Literature in England. Certainly, all things considered, he is the best of our 17th century letter-writers. His letters are full of laboured conceits after the polite manner of the age, and his conscious preoccupation with literary expression is unremitting. On the other hand his interests are enormously wide, and

none of them is tyrannical. He scatters what he himself would call "the dainty flowers of Poetry and Philosophy" throughout his pages with a light hand. He records much political news and much gossip of his time, giving us descriptions now of the negotiations for the Spanish match, now of the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham, now of Ben Jonson's arrogant behaviour at a supper-party. He was a great traveller, and by natural consequence, a great collector and retailer of anecdote. His letters have outlived the fashion of his time, by their vivacity and wit and shrewd observations of men and manners. Some critics have called him a "*coxcomb*." It is true that he was portentously interested in himself, but not to the exclusion of a delicate personal interest in others; and after all, a witty coxcomb is none of the worst company. Some of the most delightful passages in the letters are the fruit of his coxcombry; as in the self-satisfied description of his devotions:—

"I prostrate myself in the humblest and decentest way of genuflection I can imagine; nor do I believe there can be any excess of exterior humility in that place [the Church], therefore I do not like those squatting, unseemly bold postures upon one's tail, or muffling the

face in the hat, or thrusting it in some hole, or covering it with one's hand ; but with bended knee, and an open confident face, I fix my eyes on the east part of the Church, and Heaven. . . . Every day following I knock thrice at Heaven's gate, in the morning, in the evening, and at night ; besides prayers at meals, and some other occasional ejaculations, as upon the putting on of a clean shirt, washing my hands, and at lighting of candles—which, because they are sudden, I do in the third person. . . . . I thank God I have this fruit of my foreign travels, that I can pray to him every day of the week in a several language, and upon Sundays in seven, which in Oraisons of my own I punctually perform in my private pomeridian devotions. . . . . By these steps I strive to climb up to Heaven, and my Soul prompts me I shall go thither ; for there is no object in the world delights me more than to cast up my eyes that way, specially in a Star-light night. . . . ."

The vogue of Howell's letters was immediate and lasting. They ran through ten editions in the course of a century, and the compliment of imitation was paid to him by Robert Loveday in his *Persuasive Secretary* (1659), and by Thomas Forde in his *Familiar Letters* (1660). Here,

according to the Letter-Book, is the polite style in cavalier circles :—

To a Friend : " This happy night I received your last letter, ... The delights and joys which are dandled by the world were base and drossy to what that brought me, which is only less pure than those that make the angels clap their wings. It has given me a happy, but a hard task ; 'tis to let an ocean through a quill, for 'tis the same difficulty for my pen to express what my heart means you."

To a Brother : " If Nature had not planted a mutual affection in our greenest years, and taught it to swim (like a fish in its proper element) in the crimson sap we borrowed from the same fruitful stock, I think I should have bidden fair for your friendship with much industry, and like a slip that fetched his pedigree from some excellent root, set it with much diligence in my triangular garden."

Mr Thomas Forde expounds the true doctrine of letters—quoting the Italian proverb *La penna della Lingua si dove tingere nel inchiostro del cuore*, and insisting that the greatest ornament of letters is to be without any. But in the next sentence he is at his old tricks—" I would have my letters," he says, " like the herb Persica, which the Egyptians offered to their God Isis,

whose fruit was like an heart and the leaf like a tongue."

The true doctrine of fashionable expression in that age of the long-winded romances is expounded frankly and shamelessly by Thomas Blount in his *Academy of Eloquence* (1654). This work teaches polite letter-writing, and takes as its chief and most admirable model Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia.* " Thus . . did Sir Philip write to keep his style from flatness. As being to name a *Thresher*, he calls him *one of Ceres' servants;* instead of *his name was known to high and low*, he saith, *no Prince could pretend highness, nor Beggar lowness, to bar him from the sound thereof.*"

In the 17th century these expressions were taught (by books that ran through many editions) as the pink of courtly writing. Exactly the means employed by Sir Philip to avoid flatness were ridiculed by Swift and Pope and Arbuthnot in their *Art of Sinking in Poetry.* The monstrosities that I have quoted may cause us to bless Dryden and his successors the Augustans for the reform they effected in prose.

And yet it is not Dryden whom we have chiefly to thank. There was good prose written in England before Dryden's Essays. It was not found among those who (to use Wordsworth's

phrase) "either were, or were striving to make themselves persons of consideration in Society." But a whole people is not liable to the taint of literary affectation. There was pure, vigorous English spoken and written in England in the 17th century among people of no literary mark and distinction.

The Puritans, in their speech and their letter-writing, had their own mannerisms and extravagances,—the hackneyed Biblical phraseology, the flat and trivial use of emotional words. Some of these are humorously parodied in a letter that is worth quoting.

When the Royalist forces were besieged in Newark, John Cleveland was Judge-Advocate. The servant of one of the besieging officers escaped into the citadel, bringing with him more than one hundred and thirty pounds of moneys stolen from his master. The Parliamentary officer demanded that the defaulter should be given up, and in order to adapt his demand to the circumstances he couched it in the light, easy style of the Cavaliers.

"On Friday last," he writes, "one Hill by name, in no other condition than my servant, entered your Ark and with him of my monies, £133, 0s. 8d. . . . . Give the fellow his just

reward, ... if you dare not trust him, let him be trussed . . . ."

Cleveland, who was a good Cavalier, a poet and satirist, resented the assumed jocularity and lightness of this epistle, and replied as follows :—

" Sixthly, Beloved,—Is it so then, that our Brother and Fellow-labourer in the Gospel is started aside ? Then this may serve for an use of instruction, not to trust in man, nor in the son of man. Did not Demas leave Paul ? Did not Onesimus run from his master Philemon ? Besides, this should teach us to employ our talent, and not to lay it up in a napkin. . . . . You see, Sir, what use I make of the doctrine you sent me, and indeed since you change style so far as to nibble at wit, you must pardon me, if to quit scores, I pretend a little to the gift of preaching. . . . . You say that your man is entered our Ark : I am sorry you were so ignorant in Scripture as to let him come single. The text had been better satisfied if you had pleased to bear him company, for then the beasts had entered by couples. . . . . Reflect but upon yourself, how you have used your common Master, and I doubt not but you will pardon your man. He hath but transcribed Rebellion, and copied out that disloyalty in short-hand, which you have committed in text."

Nevertheless, some of the best letters of the 17th century were by Puritans.

Among the most famous are the letters of Samuel Rutherford, the Scottish divine. The Song of Solomon seems to have been the model Rutherford's style: all ecstasy and despair, expressed in poetic figure and allegory. They are of the nature of soliloquies or confessions—his aspirations are poured out heavenwards, and his letters have seldom the personal quality of interesting us in the person to whom they are addressed.

"For worldly things seeing they are meadows and fair flowers in your way to Heaven a smell in the by-going is sufficient."

"O Day, dawn! O Time, run fast! O Bridegroom, post, post fast, that we may meet! O Heavens, cleave in two, that that bright face and head may set itself through the clouds!"

"A kiss of Christ blown over his shoulder, the parings and crumbs of Glory that fall under his table in Heaven, a shower like a thin May-mist of his love, would make me green and sappy and joyful till the Summer sun of an eternal Glory."

These extracts illustrate a style as figurative as the most florid courtliness of the Cavalier Romances. But the difference is that in the one figure

is searched out for its own sake; in the other, figure presents itself unsought (as in the best poetry), and serves for the partial expression of a burning, consuming passion. Reality and sincerity breathe through all Rutherford's letters. If he runs at times into a poetical excess, it is the spirit of devotion that urges him. His mystical raptures resemble those of St Francis de Sales, save that the Scot is fiercer, more fervid, less pensive and delicate than his French forerunner.

Rutherford is a fine writer; yet he can hardly claim to be a fine letter-writer. All that makes the interest of good letters is dross to him:

"All that is under this vault of heaven, and betwixt us and death, and on this side of sun and moon, is but toys, night-visions, head-fancies, poor shadows, watery froth, godless vanities, at the best; and black hearts, and salt and sour miseries, sugared over and confected with an hour's laughter or two, and the conceit of riches, honour, vain and lawless pleasures."

The bright blaze of his spiritual vision obliterates all the lights and shadows of earth. Pleasures, tastes, the worldly business and desire of man, human affections, propinquity and property of blood—these are nothing to him,

or are snares. Where he finds men chaffering about them, balancing and comparing interests and delights, he collects them all into one scale, and throwing Eternity into the other makes them kick the beam.

"This world's span-length of time is drawn now to less than half-an-inch, and to the point of the evening of the day of this old gray-haired world."

It is surprising what vigour and beauty of metaphor the old and grey-haired world can furnish him with in this the evening of its day.

A better illustration of the Puritanic style and of what the constant study of the Bible, and of that alone, did to keep English writing pure, sane, and vigorous, may be found in the works of George Fox; not so much in his Letters as in his *Journal.*

Fox was a man of a limited, intense, and singularly candid nature. His style is completely matter-of-fact, and when he describes his own emotional experiences, it is the more vivid because it aims at no rhetorical effect on the reader. The realities of his experience need no heightening. Hence great quietude of manner and great vividness—you see what he sees, whereas Donne and the metaphysical

school write as if they had never seen anything. For example :—

" So I went away, and when I had done what business I had to do, I returned home, but did not go to bed that night, nor could not sleep, but sometimes walked up and down and sometimes prayed, and cried to the Lord, who said to me, ' Thou seest how young people go together into vanity and old people into the earth ; and thou must forsake all, both young and old, and keep out of all, and be as a stranger unto all '."

Or his inquiries among ministers of religion :— " I went to another ancient priest at Mancetter in Warwickshire and reasoned with him about the ground of despair and temptations ; but he was ignorant of my condition, and he bid me take tobacco and sing psalms. Tobacco was a thing I did not love, and psalms I was not in an estate to sing : I could not sing." One priest he went seven miles to, " but I found him but like an empty, hollow cask."

Another he called on in Coventry to ask him " the ground of temptations and despair and how troubles came to be wrought in man. . . . Now, as we were walking together in his garden, the alley being narrow, I chanced, in turning, to set my foot on the side of a bed, at which the man was in such a rage, as if his house had been on fire.

And thus all our discourse was lost, and I went away in sorrow, worse than I was when I came."

Observe the simplicity with which he narrates the revelations made to him.—"As I was walking in the fields on a first-day morning the Lord opened unto me 'that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ': and I stranged at it, because it was the common belief of people."

Here is his account of his earliest preaching.—"Then some time after the Lord commanded me to go abroad into the world, which was like a briery thorny wilderness. And when I came in the Lord's mighty power, with the word of life into the world, the world swelled and made a noise, like the great raging waves of the sea. Priests and professors, magistrates and people were all like a sea, when I came to proclaim the day of the Lord amongst them, and to preach repentance to them.

". . . . . But the black, earthly spirit of the priest wounded my life; and when I heard the bell toll to call the people together to the steeple-house, it struck at my life; for it was just like a market-bell, to gather people together, that the priest might set forth his ware to sale. . . ." (Fox held, like Milton, that no minister of religion should be paid.)

"Now as I went towards Nottingham, on a first-day in the morning, with Friends to a meeting there, when I came on top of a hill in sight of the town, I espied the great steeple-house; and the Lord said unto me 'Thou must go cry against yonder great idol, and against the worshippers therein.' So I said nothing of this to the Friends that were with me, but went on with them to the meeting, where the mighty power of the Lord was amongst us; in which I left Friends sitting at the meeting, and I went away to the steeple-house. And when I came there, all the people looked like fallow ground, and the priest (like a great lump of earth) stood in his pulpit above: And he took for his text these words of Peter—'We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereat ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.' And he told the people that this was the Scriptures, by which they were to try all doctrines, religions, and opinions. Now the Lord's power was so mighty upon me, and so strong in me, that I could not hold, but was made to cry out and say, 'Oh no, it is not the Scriptures.' But I told them what it was, namely, the Holy Spirit, by which the holy men of God gave forth the Scriptures, whereby opinions, religions and judgments were to be

tried. . . Now as I spoke thus amongst them the officers came and took me away, and put me in a nasty stinking prison; the smell whereof got so into my nose and throat that it very much annoyed me. . . . At night they took me . . before the mayor, aldermen, and sheriffs of the town, and when I was brought before them, the Mayor was in a peevish, fretful temper, but the Lord's power allayed him."

George Fox was a man of a saint-like simplicity of mind, which is reflected in the style of his *Journal;* but there were thousands of men of his time whose language was his language, used perhaps with less vividness and less vigour, but still essentially direct, plain, clear and well turned. The prose of the Court needed reform before it was tolerable in familiar letters, and the means whereby this reform came about have been discussed at length by literary critics. But the prose of the simple people of the town and country needed no conversion: so soon as the pulpit, the political journals, and other engines of popular culture had educated the people, the forthright natural style became general in English letters.

Daniel Defoe's novels, which are still unsurpassed, and admired as a model by the latest schools of French novelists, are written in the

matter-of-fact bald manner of Fox's *Journal*, from a similar vocabulary, and with an even more complete absence of poetic ornament.

It is sometimes said that Addison and Steele first created a large literary public by the success of their *Tatler* and *Spectator*. But they only did well what had been done badly for years before. The public existed—a public hungry for reading, little educated, unacquainted with the masterpieces of classical literature, caring nothing for the feuds of the Montagues and Capulets, or the woes of Œdipus or Lear, but intensely interested in the habits and doings of their neighbours. It had made the discovery that what is happening at the back door or in a neighbouring tavern is often more interesting than "the cloudy themes of old romance." This public was catered for in the multitude of forgotten books that appeared during the latter half of the 17th century, sham memoirs and sham letters holding a conspicuous place among them. Those who would now be reading the reports of murder cases and trials for breach of promise read lives of highwaymen, and collections of letters that gave to their readers a certain fearful joy—the joy of the keyhole, of hearing what one is intended not to hear. This literary form—of

sham letters—had a long history and high destinies.

Perhaps it is because they are generally unprofessional and write to please themselves that women are so often the best letter-writers. We have no one in England to compare with Madame de Sévigné for the combination of wit and tenderness. Dorothy Osborne was an exceedingly amiable and admirable lady, full of sound sense, but if you were to take away from her letters that flavour of antiquity that gives a heightened interest to all her allusions and to her descriptions of the life of the time, you would have to admit that there are a thousand writers of letters alive to-day who equal or excel her. Our nearest rival to the French letter-writer is Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, though she would have been indignant at the comparison:—"How many readers and admirers has Mme de Sévigné, who only gives us in a lively manner and fashionable phrases, mean sentiments, vulgar prejudices, and endless repetition; sometimes the tittle-tattle of a fine lady, sometimes that of an old nurse, always tittle-tattle; yet so well gilt over by airy expressions and a flowing style, she will always please the same people to whom Lord Bolingbroke will shine as a first-rate author."

Horace Walpole, in reproving a friend for preferring Lady Mary's Letters to Mme de Sévigné's, avenges the Frenchwoman :—" In Lady Mary's letters, which I never could read but once, I discovered no merit of any sort." On the other hand, he says, " Madame de Sévigné shines both in grief and gaiety. There is too much of sorrow for her daughter's absence, yet it is always expressed by new terms, by new images, and often by wit, whose tenderness has a melancholy air. . . . . She has the art of making you acquainted with all her acquaintance, and attaches you even to the spots she inhabited."

Walpole's verdict is too severe, but it is true that in Lady Mary's letters, while there is much wit and much sound sense, there is very seldom a touch of tenderness. Her best letters were written to her daughter during her last residence abroad—chiefly on the education of her grandchildren. " I believe you are the only woman," she says, " (perhaps I might say person) that never was either frightened or cheated into anything by your parents."

" If any of my granddaughters," she goes on, " are fond of reading, I would not advise you to hinder them (chiefly because it is impossible) seeing poetry, plays, or romances, but

accustom them to talk over what they read, and point out to them, as you are very capable of doing, the absurdity often concealed under fine expressions. . . . . I was so much charmed at fourteen with the dialogue of Henry and Emma, I can say it by heart to this day, without reflecting on the monstrous folly of the story in plain prose, where a young heiress to a fond father is represented falling in love with a fellow she had only seen as a huntsman, a falconer, and a beggar, and who confesses, without any circumstances of excuse, that he is obliged to run his country, having newly committed a murder.

The misfortune is that it is the letters of those otherwise famous which are chiefly preserved. Compare these by two ladies, Miss Louisa Holroyd and Miss Anna Seward. Of the former there are not three complete letters extant in print. The letters of the latter are preserved in six octavo volumes.

Louisa Holroyd. 1792, *at Bognor.*—"I have had a nice dip; the machines are very convenient with a curtain all round that nobody can see you; you are not put in as at Brighton, only one woman gives you her hand and in you jump. Aunt and I went in two machines, but close

together, so she had the satisfaction of hearing me flounce in, and I of hearing how she behaved as the same woman executed us both."

Anna Seward. 1802.—"You enquire after my health. It was not good through the rigid and gloomy winter and has not improved beneath the blooming renovation of the vegetable world. . . . . *At Hoylake.*—It is not perceivably strengthened by a five weeks residence on the amber shores, the verdant and pure-breathed downs of Hoyle Lake, nor by twenty one immersions in its billows, subdued by peculiarity of situation to unusual gentleness."

Louisa's sister, Miss Maria Josepha Holroyd, wrote better letters than her friend Gibbon. Gibbon's majestic and lofty style applied to the trivial duties of correspondence is like a classical façade to a hen-house.

Gray is a notable example of a class of persons still extant, who are nervous, shy, and awkward in society, but become themselves when they take pen in hand to write a letter. They will flee down a side alley if they see a friend approaching in the distance, and they will wonder why they fled, and they will write him a letter. The physical presence of others in a room with them makes them stiff and reserved. But when

once they are alone, the mind and the affections resume their freedom, and they pour themselves out to their friends in letters full of gaiety and ease and sympathy. You would think from their letters that they were the most brilliant talkers in the world. It is a mistake ; they can talk only to disembodied friends. Johnson said many things in conversation that would have seemed to him unworthy of the dignity of manuscript. So Gray wrote many things to his friends that he would never have dared to say.

Gray passed the greater part of his life at Cambridge, cursing the place yet unable to tear himself away from it. Why should he have continued to live there ? His quarrel, perhaps, was with the world at large, rather than with this fragment of it. It is not easy to imagine a society in which he would have felt himself completely at home.

Gray was at once sensitive and wide-minded ; his feelings could be hurt by a breath, but he could not easily be "shocked." One whose thought wanders, firm-footed, unshackled, inquisitive, into any regions where it can find a passage, will probably be annoyed by the narrow-mindedness of men, by the grooves in which their thoughts contentedly run. On the

other hand, one who is delicately susceptible of injury will be incessantly alarmed and wounded by the rudeness and robustness of the generality of his race ; he will find men as Thoreau professed to find them, " vulgar fellows." Gray suffered in both ways. Pedantry, which sees not the life-blood of men in books, but makes a separate world for them, with little rules of its own, was intolerable to him. His free humanity and quick intellectual sympathy made it easy for him to appreciate the newest as well as the oldest fashions in art. He was never tired of exploring new paths, and took no interest in the business of teaching, the beating of already beaten paths. The lecture-room fosters pedantry in the lecturer at least as certainly as the workshop fosters scholarship. The cure for pedantry is the wide, wide world. But it is a violent as well as a bracing cure, and Gray's nerves shrank from it.

He met many famous people in his life, Pope, Hogarth, and Johnson among others, but with none of them did he form a lasting acquaintance. He was not equipped for the rude give and take of London literary society, and he gave a wide berth to the Great Bear, as he called Johnson. In Johnson's society, the Literary Club, the rules of conversation resembled those of the boy's game " King of the Castle." Every one

was entitled to express his views until he lost his footing or his hearing, until, that is, he was shouted down by someone else. In such company Gray would have been silent, and miserable as well.

His real escape from the roughness of the world and the timid aridity of his immediate academic surroundings lay in his friends. "He gained from Heaven ('twas all he wished) a friend." His interest and delight in his friends was as great as the attractive power he exercised over them. None of them, it is worth noting, except Walpole, was famous or even especially remarkable—and with Walpole he quarrelled. He was difficult of approach. "Mr Gray's singular niceness in the choice of his acquaintance," says Bonstetten, "makes him appear fastidious in a great degree to all who are not acquainted with his manner." His friendship was something of a cult; those who wished for it had to "specialise" on him, to submit to long labours and the possibility of a rebuff. "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath." In this he resembles Swift, who liked to put obstacles, as a test, in the way.

To his intimates, however, once past the outworks and palisades of defence, his friendship became all in all.

Norton Nicholls wrote to his mother after Gray's death: "I thought only of him, built all my happiness on him, talked of him for ever, wished him with me whenever I partook of any pleasure, and flew to him for refuge whenever I felt any uneasiness; to whom now shall I talk of all I have seen here? Who will teach me to read, to think, to feel? I protest to you that whatever I did or thought had a reference to him. 'Mr Gray will be pleased with this when I tell him. I must ask Mr Gray what he thinks of such a person or thing. He would like such a person, and dislike such another' . . . If all the world had despised and hated me, I should have thought myself perfectly recompensed in his friendship."

In return, Gray poured himself out to his friends. The seriousness and wisdom of his letters is not the abstract wisdom of literary exercises, but wisdom wrung out of circumstances by sympathy. This, for instance, on unfeeling youth:—

"Methinks I can readily pardon sickness, and age, and vexation for all the depredations they make within and without, when I think they make us better friends, and better men, which I am persuaded is often the case. I am very sure I have seen the best-tempered generous tender

young creatures in the world that would have been very glad to be sorry for people they liked, when under any pain, and could not, merely for want of knowing rightly what it was themselves."

Or again :—

"To find oneself business (I am persuaded) is the great art of life ; and I am never so angry as when I hear my acquaintance wishing they had been bred to some poking profession, or employed in some office of drudgery, as if it were pleasanter to be at the command of other people, than at one's own ; and as if they could not go unless they were wound up."

Gray's occasional wickedness deepens the impression of sincerity left by his letters. He does not profess a feeling where he has it not. The lightness and flippancy of his account of the death of Dr Chapman may perhaps be palliated by the reflection that the deceased was not of Gray's college, and that intercollegiate like international relationships are barbarous and hostile in their essence.

To Dr Clarke, 1760 :—

"Cambridge is a delight of a place, now there is nobody in it. I do believe you would like it if you knew what it was without inhabitants. It is they, I assure you, that get it an ill name,

and spoil all. Our friend Dr Chapman (one of its nuisances) is not expected here again in a hurry. He is gone to his grave with five fine mackerel (large and full of roe) in his belly. He eat them all at one dinner; but his fate was a turbot on Trinity Sunday, of which he left little for the company besides bones. He had not been hearty all the week; but after his sixth fish he never held up his head more. . . . They say he made a very good end."

At least it may be said that here is a guarantee for the sincerity of Gray's feeling, if it were needed. "Groans and convulsions and a discoloured face, and friends weeping, and blacks and obsequies" will not induce him to play the part of a mute at a funeral, to simulate feeling where there is no need, in a letter to a friend as little implicated as himself in this sad occurrence. Gray is most, and most freely, himself in his letters.

William Cowper is called by Southey "the most popular poet of his generation, and the best of English letter-writers." It is a high claim to make for him; at the time it was made, none too high.

Consider the material out of which Cowper made his letters. Walpole had the world of

politics and of fashionable society; Lady Mary had Turkey (for some, at least, of her letters), the harems she visited and the mummies she bespoke. Cowper, the great bulk of whose letters belong to the last twenty years of his life, had nothing but a quiet house and garden, a few friends, his daily pursuits of reading, writing, walking, gardening, carpentering and attending to his tame hares. Instead of the fall of ministries and the wars of nations he is content for the most part to record events like this: "Mrs Hill's turkey is the father of fifteen beautiful children, one white and three buff;" or to narrate the escape and recapture of one of his hares. Yet the volumes of his letters have not a dull page from end to end; everything that he records or commemorates seems to gain both importance and novelty by his method of handling it.

It was Miss Anna Seward's complaint that Cowper was unacquainted and unconcerned with her own poetic works, and with those of William Hayley, the bard of Eartham. "It appears," she writes to Hayley, "from the frequency and length of his letters to his private friends . . . . that the writing them, strolling about, composing and correcting his poetry, watching his tame hares, and cleaning his linnets' cage, employed all his time. Indeed he says that he never buys

and seldom reads any new publications, and no mention is made of his being in any book club. In this voluntary and nearly total ignorance of the literature which emerged from time to time through the years of his seclusion, we see him pronouncing, in *Table Talk* and in his letters, upon the imaginary dearth of poetic talent since Pope's time. He shuts his eyes on a bright day, and tells us it is midnight. Unjust, ungenerous, self-engrossed Cowper!"

Hayley, who was his biographer, seems to have defended Cowper, but the Swan of Lichfield returned ruffled to the attack. "For you," she had said, "he expresses much personal affection . . . . (but) . . . . not once does he address you as a poet of eminence, who had diffused the lustre of his genius over the late and present period of English literature. . . . Now, you forgive Cowper for all this negative injustice to yourself and others. I own I cannot, and that, as a literary character, it costs him my esteem."

Poor Cowper! Instead of *The Triumphs of Temper* and the *Elegy on Captain Cook*, he read the Bible and Homer.

Cowper himself accounts for the vivacity and the abounding sense of fun that is found in almost all his letters, by attributing it to reaction from

the religious melancholy that oppressed him, with brief respites, all his life. It haunted him from his first derangement, when he wrote that terrible copy of Sapphic verses :—

> Man disavows, and Deity disowns me:
> Hell might afford my miseries a shelter;
> Therefore Hell keeps her ever-hungry mouths all
> Bolted against me,

down to the time, more than twenty years later, when he wrote to his friend and spiritual counsellor, the Rev. John Newton : " I have never met, either in books or in conversation, with an experience at all similar to my own. More than a twelvemonth has passed, since I began to hope that, having walked the whole breadth of the bottom of this Red Sea, I was beginning to climb the opposite shore ; and I prepared to sing the song of Moses. But I have been disappointed ; those hopes have been blasted ; those comforts have been wrested from me. I could not be so duped, even by the arch-enemy himself, as to . . question the divine nature of them ; but I have been made to believe (which, you will say, is being duped still more) that God gave them to me in derision, and took them away in vengeance." Thence to his last poem of all, wherein he compares himself to the castaway, washed overboard in the Atlantic :—

No voice divine the storm allay'd
No light propitious shone;
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
We perish'd, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.

During all this time Despair was no casual visitor, but his constant companion, or never far away, to be escaped from for a little only by good fortune and strategy.

Cowper repeatedly traces the gaiety and the delightful nonsense of his letters to this dominant emotion. "The effort we make to get rid of a load," he says, "is usually violent in proportion to the weight of it. . . . Perhaps you remember the Undertakers' dance in the *Rehearsal*, which they perform in crape hat-bands and black cloaks, to the tune of 'Hob or Nob', one of the sprightlest airs in the world. Such is my fiddling, and such is my dancing."

Again, alluding to Swift's darling motto *Vive la bagatelle*, he says, "*La bagatelle* has no enemy in me. . . . . If I trifle, and merely trifle, it is because I am reduced to it by necessity—a melancholy that nothing else so effectually disperses engages me sometimes in the arduous task of being merry by force. And, strange as it may seem, the most ludicrous lines I ever wrote have been written in the saddest mood, and but for

that saddest mood perhaps had never been written at all. To say truth, it would be a shocking vagary, should the mariners on board a ship buffeted by a terrible storm employ themselves in fiddling and dancing; yet sometimes much such a part act I."

The explanation is Cowper's own, yet it is hardly satisfactory. These figures of the Harlequin, of the dancing undertakers, of the revellers on the sinking ship, are not truly descriptive. There is nothing of violence, or of "being merry by force," in the gentle spontaneous omnipresent humour of his letters. His wit, too, is quite unlike Swift's lightning flashes of hatred and scorn—indeed, the account he gives of his own mirth might more appropriately be applied to Swift's.

The fact would seem to be that Cowper by nature and temperament was a humorist, and took a keen pleasure in playing with ideas, in the jugglery of the intellect which is humour. But his religious creed inspired him with a suspicion that this pleasure was wrong and criminal; the shadow of one idea, the idea of his accountability to the Sovereign Judge, is thrown over the play of his fancy.

His religious convictions explain his humour in another way. They made it impossible for

him to be serious about trifles. Now seriousness about trifles is the soul of three-quarters of the dullness in the world. From this form of dullness, at least, Cowper was saved. "God knows," he writes to Newton, "that my mind having been occupied more than twelve years in the contemplation of the most distressing subjects, the world and its opinion of what I write is become as unimportant to me as the whistling of a bird in a bush." The world and the trifles with which it is so richly furnished, in the presence of these overpowering interests, were bound to be treated either as temporary playthings or as objects of just contempt. But contempt was wholly foreign to so gentle a temper as Cowper's, quick to sympathy in pleasure and pain.

His general tone is one of playfulness. "I delight in baubles and know them to be so; for rested in, and viewed without a reference to their Author, what is the earth,—what are the planets,—what is the sun itself but a bauble?" To delight in baubles, knowing them to be so, is to be something of a humorist.

He himself tells a story: "I remember . . that Sam Cox the counsel, walking by the seaside as if absorbed in deep contemplation, was questioned about what he was musing on. He replied, 'I was wondering that such an almost infinite

unwieldy element should produce a *sprat.*'" The observation might serve as a parable to explain Cowper's humour. His sprats are the harvest of the deep.

I should not dare to lament, or to ridicule, as some holiday critics have done, the melancholy "aberrations" of Cowper's intellect. They seem to me of a piece with his tenderness and his imagination, with the qualities that give value to his letters. To wish this or that quality away in a man is to pretend to improve a machine that we do not understand.

At any rate we may find the secret of letter-writing, if only it could be learnt, in Cowper's pages. He had no *method* in writing letters. "As to method," he writes to Lady Hesketh, "you know as well as I that it is never more out of its place than in a letter." Or rather his method was to take a sheet of his largest paper and to lay it before him on his desk. He then addressed himself in a suitable invocation to someone, relative or friend, for whom he had a sincere affection. This is the real essential, for it was his affection for his friends that set Cowper's imagination to work. Then the pen flew—too readily according to his own account; "I had need to take care," he says, "when I begin a letter, that the subject with which I set

off be of some importance, for before I can exhaust it, be it what it may, I have generally filled my paper." But he did *not* take care to choose "subjects of importance." He expounds his secret in a letter to Mr Unwin: "You like to hear from me: this is a very good reason why I should write. But I have nothing to say: this seems equally a good reason why I should not. Yet if you had alighted from your horse at our door this morning, and at this present writing, being five o'clock in the afternoon, had found occasion to say to me,—'Mr Cowper, you have not spoke since I came in: have you resolved never to speak again?', it would be but a poor reply if in answer to the summons I should plead inability as my best and only excuse. And this by the way . . . reminds me of what I am very apt to forget when I have any epistolary business in hand, that a letter may be written upon anything or nothing just as that anything or nothing happens to occur."

Cowper's retirement at Olney or at Weston was not absolutely without occurrences. He planted things in his greenhouse and they came up.

Sometimes friends sent him presents, and the presents arrived. "What a comfort it is," he ejaculates, "to have a friend who knows

that we love salmon, and who cannot pass a fishmonger's shop, without finding his desire to send us some a temptation too strong to be resisted."

Sometimes—very rarely—visitors appeared, and he tasted the giddy delights of fame. "I was pacing yesterday under the elms that surround the field. . . when, lifting my eyes, I saw two black genteel figures bolt through a hedge into the path where I was walking. You guess already who they were, and that they could be nobody but our neighbours.

"They had seen me from a hill at a distance, and had traversed a great turnip-field to get at me. You see therefore, my dear, that I am in some request."

Once a parliamentary candidate, "a most loving, kissing, kind-hearted gentleman," succeeded in "effecting his entrance" to the house at Olney—visitors were liable to be rebuffed, but "candidates are creatures not very susceptible of affronts, and would rather climb in . . at a window than be absolutely excluded." Once also a parish clerk from a distant parish came to ask Cowper to write a copy of verses to annex to his Christmas bill of mortality. Cowper recommended him to a certain statuary, or tombstone-sculptor, "a first-rate maker of verses." "Alas,

sir," said the man, "I have heretofore borrowed help from him, but he is a gentleman of so much reading, that the people of our town cannot understand him."

But if Cowper writes well upon anything that happens, he writes best when nothing, absolutely nothing, has happened. He knows only that he wants to write, and says so, then goes on to discuss the gregarious and social instinct in man; elaborates a fanciful theory of the origin of society, and ends: "Now upon the word of a poor creature, I have said all that I have said without the least intention to say one word of it when I began. But thus it is with my thoughts; — when you shake a crab-tree, the fruit falls."

Or he feels disinclined to write and explains his disinclination, how in the morning he is heavy and sleepy, and in the evening wakeful, whence follows a dissertation on the advantages enjoyed by our forefathers the Picts,—the strength of their nerves, the flow of their spirits, and their robust bodily health, so that if a cough could have seized a Pict, "his friends would have concluded that a bone had stuck in his throat."

Or he has no time to write and explains in his letter that he has no time. "I have just

time to observe that time is short, and by the time I have made the observation, time is gone. I have wondered in former days at the patience of the Antediluvian world, that they could endure a life almost millenary with so little variety as seems to have fallen to their share." And so he is led on to give a sketch of the employments of a day as he would have spent it if he had been born a thousand years before Noah.

Cowper can make a sufficient theme for a letter out of the pen he writes with or the table he writes on. He is fearless of the smallest detail and the most minute descriptions. He knows that his friend is interested in all the daily doings of his household, and his zest in his subject is not damped by any suspicion that he is inflicting trivialities on his correspondent. His humour and imagination play freely around the card-table. But the chief part of his skill is seen in the personal implications and references—in the juxtaposition of the card-table and that stern, uncompromising Calvinist, in doctrine and practice a sworn foe to all card-tables, the Rev. John Newton. Cowper introduces them playfully—"the Reverend John Newton—the card-table"—and then seeing in imagination the reverend gentleman start

back aghast, his wig rising on his head with horror, proceeds to explain that this particular table is harmless—a converted card-table.

This sympathetic imagination is seen at work in all Cowper's letters—the best of which are written to the Rev. John Newton, and to another very different person, his lively cousin, Lady Hesketh. Always the same motive of affection gives life to his pen. "Seriously," he writes, apologising for sending a present of fowls, "you must not deny us one of the greatest pleasures we can have, which is, to give you now and then a little tiny proof how much we value you. We cannot sit with our hands before us, and be contented with only saying that we love Lady Hesketh."

Cowper's excursions into the wider realms of literature often show his amiable genius at a disadvantage. He began with Moral Satires, but is under the disadvantage of not knowing the world that he condemns. It could not be said to him, as the Duke said to Jaques, that he was guilty of

> Most mischievous foul sin in chiding sin,
> For thou thyself hast been a libertine.

He rails on a world that he hardly knew—impotently and from a distance.

As, on geologists :—

> Some drill and bore
> The solid earth, and from the strata there
> Extract a register, by which we learn
> That he who made it, and reveal'd its date
> To Moses, was mistaken in its age.

On astronomers, who

> Spend
> The little wick of life's poor shallow lamp
> In playing tricks with nature, giving laws
> To distant worlds, and trifling in their own.

All this is sad stuff, and reminds me of the son of John Evelyn the diarist, who died at the age of five. This forward youth made many surprising applications of Scripture in his familiar talk, and "declaimed against the vanities of the world before he had seen any."

The best passages of his longer poems deal with the homely and intimate world that is found also in the letters—the kettle singing on the hearth, the winter walk in the woods, and all those mild, agreeable scenes of outdoor Nature, drawn, so to say, from a bath-chair.

Note the curious problem of Burns's letters, with their polite jargon and sentimental excesses, and trail of insincerity.

Wordsworth wrote such letters as he might have been expected to write,—" daddy Wordsworth."

Sir Walter Scott's letters, like his journal, are an embodiment of all his splendid qualities of mind and heart—they bear the impression of his magnanimity and gentleness and goodness. But so, in greater or less degree, does everything he wrote.

Of two poets of the Romantic Revival, Byron and Keats, it may be said that we should not know them as we do but for their letters. In his poems Byron was something of a *poseur*, but in his letters, because they are written to friends, all this is put away ; they are simple, sincere, straightforward, candid and manly, full of wise criticisms on literature, and sage reflections on life, without the least sham elevation or rodomontade. They show no traces of the sentimentalism of some of the poems.

So with Keats. The publication of his letters blew into thin air the phantom " Johnny Keats " that had been evoked by the *Quarterly* and *Blackwood*. Keats's letters are a perfect handbook to literary criticism, and show, moreover, his strength of mind in his personal affairs. It was his relatives and friends who leant on him

rather than he on them. But most of the notable passages of the letters deal with those subjects of poetry and criticism that occupied him almost wholly: with realities—"sun, moon, stars, and passages of Shakespeare."

"The roaring of the wind is my wife and the stars through the window-pane are my children. The mighty abstract idea I have of Beauty in all things stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness."

If there is any name with which one would dare to challenge Southey's verdict, it is the name of Charles Lamb.

If what is personal is the life of letters, Lamb has a singular advantage, for he is the most intensely personal of English writers. His books are books by accident—his letters posthumous—his essays not written till he was nearer fifty than forty. His poems cannot maintain themselves in an impersonal atmosphere—Troy and Rome were nothing to him compared to Islington and "The green plains of pleasant Hertfordshire," which he apologises for introducing into a sonnet. His best-known poem is autobiographical—"Where are they gone, the old familiar faces?", passing in review the tragic death of his mother, his quarrel with Charles

Lloyd and Coleridge, and the memories of his early life.

His literary remains are, therefore, the quintessence of his life and character. There never was a spirit with more zest in life, more delicately susceptible to all its pleasures and pains. In his youth he was full of the ardour of doing, and his earliest letters show him discussing literary affairs with his friend and monitor Coleridge. Then the blow fell, and from that time forth Lamb's ambitions were destroyed, and there was a background of melancholy to the lightest of his jesting.

It is perhaps something more than a coincidence that a tragic misery should have visited both Cowper and Lamb—in my opinion the two best letter-writers in our language. It would be unfair to say that it humanised them both, for Lamb's genius from the first was compact of humanity, but it washed away the last remnants of inhumanity—the inhumanity of self-help, the inhumanity of self-seeking, the inhumanity of happiness, which makes "the best-tempered, generous, tender young creatures in the world," as Gray observed, unable to be sorry for people they like when under any pain, "merely for want of knowing rightly what it is themselves."

Lamb's humanity (I can find no better word

for that incurable, almost pitiful, attachment to places and people) was a passion with him. He had no taste for abstract truths or for anything that is demonstrable — for truth is cold, but opinions are warm. His imperfect sympathy for Scotchmen was partly due to their love for argument in philosophical matters and for full-fledged systems. The sympathy he sought and offered was more complete than most people find or give during the course of their whole lives. It is the peculiar quality of this sympathy that he takes his stand upon the weaknesses of humanity, and finds them more comforting than strength.

There is a characteristic passage in "New Year's Eve":

"I am in love with this green earth; the face of town and country; the unspeakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets. I would set up my tabernacle here. I am content to stand still at the age to which I am arrived; I, and my friends: to be no younger, no richer, no handsomer. I do not want to be weaned by age, or drop like mellow fruit, as they say, into the grave. Any alteration on this earth of mine, in diet or in lodging, puzzles and discomposes me. . . . Sun, and sky, and breeze, and solitary walks, and summer holidays, and the greenness of fields, and the delicious juices of meats and

fishes, and society, and the cheerful glass, and candlelight, and fireside conversations, and innocent vanities, and jests, and *irony itself*—do these things go out with life? . . . And you, my midnight darlings, my Folios! must I part with the intense delight of having you (huge armfuls) in my embraces? Must knowledge come to me, if it comes at all, by some awkward experiment of intuition, and no longer by this familiar process of reading?"

"This green earth,"—"I and my friends,"—"the familiar process of reading." He loved only this familiar—and would have flouted any sort of love at first sight. When Mr Randal Norris of the Inner Temple died, Lamb wrote: "He was my friend and my father's friend all the life I can remember. I seem to have made foolish friendships ever since. Those are friendships which outlive a second generation. Old as I am waxing, in his eyes I was still the child he first knew me. To the last he called me Charley. I have none to call me Charley now."

Lamb lived in the sympathy of his friends, as he explains in a letter to Wordsworth:—

"Two or three have died within this last two twelvemonths, and so many parts of me have been numbed. One sees a picture, reads an anecdote, starts a casual fancy, and thinks to tell

of it to this person in preference to every other : the person is gone whom it would have peculiarly suited. It won't do for another. Every departure destroys a class of sympathies. There's Captain Burney gone ! What fun has whist now ? What matters it what you lead, if you can no longer fancy him looking over you ? . . . Thus one distributes oneself about, and now for so many parts of me I have lost the market. Common natures do not suffice me. Good people, as they are called, won't serve. I want individuals. I am made up of queer points and I want so many answering needles."

As he poured himself out to his friends, his letters contain the " first sprightly runnings " of many of the essays. The ideas of the essays are often such as occur more naturally in conversation with a friend than in solitary meditation. Lamb did not " make essay " of his own mind like Montaigne by applying to it the touchstone of themes and books ; he communicated his thoughts and feelings as they arose. Lamb's essays are discoveries in which he is anxious that his reader should go halves with him.

Almost all his essays are suggested by memories of his life, or by the circumstances of his friends. So perhaps his friend Manning suggests his essay of *Distant Correspondents ; The Two Races*

of Men is suggested by Coleridge; *A Quaker's Meeting* by B. Barton. The famous *Dissertation upon Roast Pig* was elaborated from a letter he sent to Coleridge on an actual pig. There is less forethought and architecture about the latter. The essay leads more carefully up to the climax of "that insidious, good-for-nothing, old grey impostor."

Being written to many correspondents and adapted to many points of view, Lamb's letters vary through all tones—from the curt intensity of the letter in which he informs Coleridge of the disaster that has befallen his family, to the wild punning of some of the letters to Manning. But his wit and his wisdom are equally spontaneous—equally spring from the *occasion* and his own feelings. There is not a moral adage to be found in all his letters, nor a single conventional or hollow sentiment. Conventionality crumbles at his touch, as, for instance, when he deals in a letter with the old commonplace of consolation on the death of a child—'that it is snatched away from possible crime and vanities.' Lamb analyses the idea mercilessly, but concludes: "In these things we grope and flounder, and if we can pick up a little human comfort that the child taken is snatched from vice (no great compliment to it, by the bye), let us take it."

This perfect candour of attitude appears again and again in the letters: "I am sitting opposite a person who is making strange distortions with the gout, which is not unpleasant—to me at least . . . Hazlitt, who boldly says all he feels, avows that not only he does not pity sick people, but he hates them. I obscurely recognise his meaning."

One result of Lamb's sincerity is that when he is moved to a grave reflection it comes with a strange force and freshness, *e.g.*, on the death of a friend:—

"But words are vain. We have none of us to count upon many years. That is the only cure for sad thoughts. If only some died and the rest were permanent on earth, what a thing a friend's death would be then!"

This same thought fired the imagination of the Greek poet (Bion) who wrote that most moving lament of Cytherea over Adonis where she cries: "Ah, ill-fated, thou art fleeing me, thou art fleeing far, Adonis, and art faring to Acheron, to that hateful king and cruel, while wretched I yet live, being a goddess, and may not follow thee!" In the simple expression of his own feeling Lamb unconsciously echoes one of the splendours of Greek literature.

In writing to Wordsworth, he pleads for the

town against that apostle of the mountains, and is caught up by his emotions into a dithyrambic strain which anticipates the crowded and passionate inventories of Walt Whitman :—

" Separate from the pleasure of your company, I don't much care if I never see a mountain in my life. I have passed all my days in London, until I have formed as many and intense local attachments as any of you mountaineers can have done with dead nature. The lighted shops of the Strand . . . the innumerable trades, tradesmen, and customers, coaches, waggons, play-houses ; all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden ; the watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles ; life awake, if you awake, at all hours of the night ; the impossibility of being dull in Fleet Street ; the crowds, the very dirt and mud, the sun shining upon houses and pavements, the print shops, the old bookstalls, parsons cheapening books, coffee-houses, steams of soups from kitchens, the pantomimes,—London itself a pantomime and a masquerade—all these things work themselves into my mind and feed me without the power of satiating me. The wonder of these sights impells me into night walks about her crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fulness of joy at so much life."

In passages like these we see literature in the making. "Great thoughts spring from the heart;" everything that Lamb says bears the warrant of life and experience and comes with an air of complete novelty, because it is so deeply felt.

It is this that gives its extraordinary value to Lamb's literary criticisms. The world of books and the world of living men are not two worlds to him, but one; everything that he touches he brings at once into vital relation with the human lot, and his remarks upon literature are steeped in his own humanity. He has sometimes been foolishly accused of affected archaism—was told that his thoughts were "villainously pranked in an affected array of antique words and phrases." The only answer is his own, that this way was natural to him; the seventeenth century worthies were not his *authorities* for it, but his friends, and he caught the trick of their speech from sheer sympathy. There is no trace of pedantry in all Lamb's writing. This is higher praise than it seems. Pedantry is the fault not only of

> The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,
> With loads of learned lumber in his head,

but of all whose knowledge is a thing apart, imperfectly or not at all related to the scheme of things. It is possible to know only one fact, and yet to

know that fact in such a way as to be entitled to the name of pedant. We talk of "furnishing the mind" with knowledge, but how rarely is it done! For the most part we store the second-hand furniture of knowledge in the bleak warehouse of the mind. It has no fitness or beauty there, it is put to no human use, there is a monstrous excess of it, and much of it is upside down. Now the opposite of a *pedant* I take to be a *scholar*, one whose knowledge is delicately ordered, polished, and ready for use, like a case of surgeon's instruments. The scholar sees all things in a vital relationship, and for him among dead authors there is no dead man. There is thus more of temperament and gift in scholarship than of mere acquisition. Judged by this standard, Lamb was one of the most superb scholars that ever handled literature. Hear him on Robert Lloyd's translation of Homer. Lamb explains that he is a mere "English" reader—"*homo unius linguae*"—and apologises for carping at single words. But Lamb's strength was that in Greek, or in any other language, he knew what a poet would be at. This is a good enough piece of criticism on Homer translations:—

"What I seem to miss, and what certainly everybody misses in Pope, is a certain savage-like plainness of speaking in Achilles—a sort of

indelicacy—the heroes in Homer are not half civilised, they utter all the cruel, all the selfish, all the *mean thoughts* even, of their nature, which it is the fashion of our great men to keep in. . . . Your principles and turn of mind . . . lead you to *civilise* his phrases, and sometimes to *half christen* them."

Mr Lloyd translated τύμβος and σῆμα by the word "*Tumulus.*" Lamb remarked, "Tumulus is too much like *making Homer talk Latin.* Tumulus is always spoken by an English mouth with a consciousness of *scientific attainment.*" Mr Lloyd introduced the phrase "unaffected grace." Lamb objects. "Is there any word in Homer to express *affectation?* I think not. Then certainly he has no such idea as *unaffected.*" Mr Lloyd made someone "express his sentiments." Lamb: "*Sentiments*—I would root this word out of a translation of Homer. It came in with Sterne, and was a child he had by Affectation."

You may see his scholarship in these or any other of his scattered diffident criticisms—down to the minutest. You may see it even in this, that in all the multitude of his quotations from other authors there is hardly one that is verbally accurate. "Is it a fatality in me," he says, "that everything I touch turns into a lie? I

once quoted two lines from a translation of Dante, which Hazlitt very greatly admired, and quoted in a book as a proof of the stupendous power of that poet; but no such lines are to be found in the translation, which has been searched for the purpose. I must have dreamed them, for I am quite certain I did not forge them knowingly." In short, Lamb knew pretty well what Dante would have said, and forgot that, in point of fact, Dante had not said it. He assimilated the authors he admired, so that they became bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, and underwent change with his own organic processes of thought.

What is true of Lamb's learning is true also of his wonderful humour—it is primed with the spirit of humanity, whether it take the form of the wildest fun, or assume a sombre, almost tragic cast.

Why are the best letters so often humorous? Because humour is "thinking in fun while feeling in earnest." In a letter to a friend the thought is often unimportant, and the feeling, if it be only a desire to entertain him, everything.

If, then, Lamb is the most perfect letter-writer in our language, it is not because he has some literary talisman, but because he is the most amiable of English writers. We do not ask for

amiability in the author of an epic, but in letters it is at a premium. His faults are not the least endearing and not the least virtuous things about him. Our pinch-faced temperance may serve as virtue (though indeed it is only a habit) for lack of something better; but if there is a reckoning, Charles Lamb's occasional excesses with the cheerful glass will be counted to him for a higher righteousness.

Some Notes on Lord Chesterfield.

[*These Notes are taken from a paper which formed no part of the Letter-writers series, but dealt with Chesterfield as a public man and as an epistolary adviser of youth. It seemed convenient to place them here*]

I should not wish to defend all Chesterfield's positive advices in his letters to his son—far from it. But some of them have been cried out against with too great zeal. He recommends flattery, it is said, as a useful and desirable practice. So he does—he regards it as a necessary amenity of society.

But there is such a simple preservative within reach of us all that I rather wonder that an outcry should be raised against the practice. We have only to cease to swallow it, and all is well.

But we are not very consistent or dignified in this matter. We are too apt to raise our protest against the immorality of those who sell us the liquor we wish to drink, give us the bribes we wish to take, and say to us the things that we find pleasantest to hear.

Mr Philip Stanhope seems to have been a naturally awkward and ungracious person, who after he had read some hundreds of letters from his father on the ways of pleasing, discovered that anyone might save himself a deal of trouble if only he did not wish to please.

It would be easy to moralise on the career of Lord Chesterfield and his two chief disappointments, to show how they were due to his own errors of judgment and his own faults of character. But I cannot help thinking that such a line of argument is very dangerous. If men who attain worldly success always succeeded by their qualities, if men who fail in the dearest objects that they set before them always failed because of their defects, the problems of morals would indeed be simple problems, and philosophers in search of subtlety might seek elsewhere. But worldly success, as often as not, is attained by a happy mixture of the right qualities with the right defects, and the virtues are punished

with failure as often as the vices. So that we shall take a safer course if instead of hastening to judge we content ourselves with the humbler effort and try to understand. The attempt to understand the character and career of any man, great or small, almost always, if it be successful, ends in the same way, in sympathy and appreciation.

A man who succeeds as Chesterfield did, in never being duped, generally buys his immunity at a very high price; the greatest successes in war and society have often been won by those who trusted most and most magnificently.

If Chesterfield had been asked to state his opinion on the relative merits of Dante and Addison as writers, it is impossible to feel confident that he would have given Dante the first place.

Of Voltaire's *Henriade* Chesterfield says that he never read an Epic poem with half so much pleasure. "I must have all sense, and cannot, for the sake of five righteous lines, forgive a thousand absurd ones." Homer and Milton accordingly seemed absurd to him. Of Milton he says: "Not having the honour to be acquainted with any of the parties of his Poem, except the Man and the Woman, the characters and speeches of a

dozen or two of Angels, and of as many Devils, are as much above my reach as my entertainment. Keep this secret for me ; for if it should be known, I should be abused by every tasteless Pedant and every solid Divine in England." I believe there are many persons alive in England who sympathise with Lord Chesterfield in this matter, and find *Paradise Lost* lacking in interest ; but the secret is well kept.

Every one knows Voltaire's admiration for England and the English. He expressed it generously even in his frigid so-called Epic the *Henriade*. In a letter to Pope, Voltaire asked him to translate four lines of the poem wherein he had eulogised this country and people. Pope never complied with the request, and it is left for me to try :—

No desert is found in that spacious domain,
Their crops hide the hills, and their cattle the plain,
The wide waters are blanched with their ships' spreading wings,
They are lords of the earth, on the sea they are Kings.

Chesterfield's parting advice to his Irish friends, "Be more afraid of Poverty than of the Pope," deserves a place beside his famous prediction of the French Revolution as an example of political insight.

Chesterfield's character was ill-adapted to the handling of the political machinery of his time. A certain pride and delicacy made the corruption of the day distasteful to him; and it is fair to add, a certain native integrity made it odious. In the much abused letters to his son he insists not only on graceful manners, but also on clean hands for a statesman.

It is not however to his integrity alone that his failure in political life must be attributed. He had a very pretty turn for satire, and he indulged it freely. Now of the sort of pointed, witty sayings that are so plentifully attributed to him it may be said as of the minutes of a sundial, *Pereunt et imputantur.* They have a moment's success, and are remembered against you. He early gained the dangerous reputation of a wit.

III

ON CHAUCER

When George III visited Norwich, he remarked to the Mayor, "You have a very ancient town, Mr Mayor." And the Mayor said, "Yes, your Majesty, and formerly it was much more ancient." The reply, like all Irish bulls, was good sense, and it may be applied to Chaucer. He is an ancient writer, and formerly he was much more ancient. No generation since he wrote is better fitted to appreciate him than the present.

The foreign invasion of the Renaissance did not overwhelm Chaucer—he still had Spenser and Shakespeare for pupils; but it set up new models. It studied intoxication where he had taught sobriety; it sought after "a fine madness" where he had followed sanity; and it regarded Chaucer himself, that great and chaste master of the English speech, as a merry old buffoon.

What can be learnt about Chaucer himself

from his poems? Something every third line.

Note Chaucer's horror of the mob or crowd. The people are introduced by Chaucer merely as a background, a shifting, treacherous sea of opinion and ignorance and suspicion. Their chief function is to stand around and gaze and whisper. When Constance in her long wanderings is cast on a heathen land :—

> Doun from the castle comth ther many a wight
> To gauren on this ship and on Custance.

When Zenobia was overthrown by the Roman Emperor, Aurelian, and led in triumph, Chaucer cries :—

> Allas, Fortune! she that whylom was
> Dredful to Kinges and to Emperoures,
> Now gaureth al the peple on hir, allas!

When the Carpenter in his delusion cuts the rope of the kneading tub and falls on the floor, breaking his arm :—

> The neighebores, bothe smale and grete,
> In ronnen, for to gauren on this man.

When Troilus is waiting, all in vain, for Cressida to come back to Troy as she had promised, and when the long day draws to a close,

he comforts himself that she may yet come, at night :—

> Now douteles, this lady can hir good ;
> I woot, she meneth ryden prively.
> I comende hir wysdom, by myn hood !
> She wol not maken peple nycely
> Gaure on hir, whan she comth ; but softely
> By nighte into the toun she thenketh ryde.

These are the activities of Chaucer's people ; they gape, and stare ; they run after every novelty, and forget their old allegiance ; they believe fables and are ready to think evil, and seek their own damnation. His distrust of them is even expressed in his own person :—

Auctor. O stormy peple ! unsad and ever untrewe !

Chaucer, like Gower, uses many arguments that might have been, and some that were used by John Ball, in his preaching. But these arguments were the commonplaces of the age, and are used by Chaucer and Gower not to stir up the people, but to teach duty to those of high estate. The common things of humanity, and their all-importance compared with the artificial distinctions invented by man—this has always been a poet's theme.

Of the noble Charlemagne Cycle of Romances

Chaucer seems to know little or nothing. Like some modern politicians, who know nothing of the Christian religion save that a person called Judas was connected discreditably with it, Chaucer seems to have heard only of the proverbial treachery of Ganelon.

Every kind of apology has been offered for Griselda. But they won't wash. She had no right to keep her own word at the expense, as she believed, of her children's lives. But the truth is, this is an irrelevant criticism. The tale was born in a religious atmosphere ; Griselda is a saint and a martyr, a type of all who have suffered the extremest tortures from fidelity to their lord. She is not a patient woman ; she is Patience. If her conduct is impugned, the moral is destroyed. And the tale was invented for the moral (very beautifully invented), not the moral for the tale. The moral involves the idolatry of a single virtue, and makes chaos of human life.

Chaucer was a great metrical artist. His school was the French artificial forms of verse. He is a proof of the benefits of early practice in tight forms. No good ever came of a young poet who began with blank verse and stuck to it.

The artistic development of Chaucer may be briefly stated : he passed from complex to

simple forms, and from simple to complex matter.

More than any other, Chaucer gave us our prosody. He was not only a founder, but in certain kinds of poetic expression he has never since been surpassed.

It was as great an innovation when he finally discarded mediæval methods and mediæval convention to paint the life he saw around him. Simplicity, directness, clarity, truth: these are late, almost artificial, qualities in literature. The true record of facts—how late and how difficult a thing that is! Whole races never attain to it. It is a quality of mature life and age rather than of youth.

What shall be said of the Wife of Bath, so brilliant and audacious in her cynicism? She is a poet, as Falstaff is a poet. The width of range that included her has become impossible in a society where every class is self-conscious. Her ideal of life is complete, rounded, full of zest, not dependent on opinion. She meditates more husbands, on the death of her fourth; and her prayer at the conclusion of her tale is for a plentiful supply of meek, young spouses, and for the grace to outlive them. "Allas, allas! that ever love was sinne!" she cries. Chaucer puts real

and sincere sentiment into the mouth of this coarse and hearty dame. The line might have been spoken over Tristram and Iseult.

Chaucer's strong sanity and critical commonsense, his quick power of observation, and his distaste for all extravagances and follies helped to make him a great comic poet. But he is not a railing wit, or a bitter satirist. His broad and calm philosophy of life, his delight in diversities of character, his sympathy with all kinds of people, and his zest in all varieties of experience —these are the qualities of a humorist.

Charles Lamb thought with misgiving of a heaven in which all irony and ironical modes of expression should be lacking. Certainly it would be no heaven for Chaucer. The all-pervading essence of his work is humour. Sometimes it breaks out in boisterous and rollicking laughter at the drunken and unseemly exploits of churls; sometimes it is so delicate and evanescent that you can hardly detect its existence. But it is everywhere, even in places where it has no right to be. The intellectual pleasure of standing aside and seeing things against an incongruous background was a pleasure he could not long forgo.

In this matter, and in this alone, Chaucer is sometimes guilty of what I shall call "literary

bad manners." It is like the fault of distracted attention. Even at a funeral he must insinuate his jest. Now, it is quite excusable to jest at a funeral so long as it is regarded as a formal, official function; or if it is merely matter for thought. The suit of clay as the dwelling-house made for this creature a little lower than the angels is a jest of the Gods. But Chaucer will arouse deep feelings of pathos and sympathy, and in the atmosphere thus created, he will let off a little crackling penny jest, from pure love of mischief. This spirit of witty mischief is always breaking out.

Chaucer has the true humorist's gift—the gift of the wooden face. He utters a truism ("Honesty is the best policy") with a solemn air; and only the faintest twinkle in the eye makes one hesitate in believing him serious.

Chaucer's self-consciousness is of a piece with his critical art. Sometimes (as in *Troilus* and the *Knight's Tale*) he is fairly caught in the web of his own imagination, and forgets himself. Far more frequently he reminds you of his presence by some sly allusion to himself, or some ironical piece of self-depreciation. Then the tale becomes a mere tale again, and we come back into the company of the teller.

This is a common trait of the humorist. He sees much that is ridiculous in human life; what if he himself is ridiculous? So he anticipates criticism, and discounts the retort, by laughing at himself.

You will find this in Falstaff ("I do here walk before thee like a sow that hath overwhelmed all her litter but one."). You may find it in all the jackanapes tricks of Sterne, his posturings and grimaces. You will find it in Mr Bernard Shaw, who cannot forget that laughter is generally a hostile weapon, and is unwilling to stand the push of it in championing his ideas. Being skilled with it, he over-values it and over-fears it. So, like Bob Acres, he stands edgeways, or turns his weapon against himself, that he may still be on the side of the laughers.

This furnishes excellent wit and comedy, but is not consistent with good epical work. The man who is afraid of being caught in a serious sentiment lest others should find it ridiculous, cannot tell a moving tale in a forthright, wholehearted way. His mind is a kingdom divided against itself,—under two kings, a warrior and a clown. A cavalry charge cannot be led by one who is thinking of the figure he cuts in the eyes of a bystander. The professions of reformer and humorist have never been suc-

cessfully combined. A reformer does not care who laughs.

The escape from this sort of self-consciousness —the besetting sin of the professed humorist—is in the drama ; and all Chaucer's best and deepest humour occurs in parts of his work that are dramatic in everything but form. The dramatist stands aside and has not to defend himself. He speaks through many voices, and is himself unseen. He looks at human life and portrays it, and smiles.

All profound dramatic humour depends on sympathy and breadth of view, that keeps sight of the whole even while it spends delighted attention on a part. A wit or a satirist can be angry and laugh ; he can laugh at what he misunderstands and misrepresents. The dramatic humorist laughs because he understands and enjoys. Now there never was a poet whose zest and delight in life was fuller and broader than Chaucer's. He hates nothing that he has made ; in the realms of his creation the sun shines upon the evil and the good. His characters, as they come alive, almost always find in him an admirer and abetter. Pandarus, it is to be supposed, was originally designed to be a base, broken lackey, just as Falstaff may have been

designed for a shallow, vainglorious, lying, heartless rascal. But Pandarus, like Falstaff, comes alive, and we end by almost loving him. He has the worldly wisdom, the shrewd humour, the tender affections, and the philosophic outlook of his creator. He is a good friend, and, like Falstaff, he too is a poet.

Anything fair to see or hear awakes Chaucer's enthusiasm. Of Troilus riding into Troy he says :—

> It was an hevene upon him for to see!

When the people applaud, Troilus blushes :—

> That to biholde it was a noble game.

When Antigone sings in the garden :—

> It an heven was hir voys to here.

Anything on a large and generous scale, such as the housekeeping of the Franklin ("It snewed in his hous of mete and drinke"), or the marriages of the Wife of Bath, arouses Chaucer's sympathy. He loves a rogue, so that the rogue be high-spirited and clever at his trade, and not a whey-faced, bloodless rascal. The Pardoner, in describing his own preaching, says :—

> Myn hondes and my tonge goon so yerne,
> That it is joye to see my bisinesse,

and so Chaucer felt it. His joy is chronic and irrepressible.

Chaucer makes the most enormous claim on the sound sense and quick intelligence of his readers. He assumes that they are at one with him, and that it is unnecessary for him to expound his point of view. The natural form for the dramatic sense of humour is irony. Often enough Chaucer's irony is dramatic, as when the Carpenter, in the very act of being befooled by Nicholas the clerk, congratulates himself that he is a plain, unlearned man. But the best of Chaucer's irony is found in his own interpolated utterances. He seems to be telling the story simply and directly. Suspect him! He is conveying his own criticisms, expressing his own amusement, in touches—a word here and a word there—so subtle and delicate that eleven out of twelve men in any jury would acquit him of any comic intent. These quiet smiles that flicker over his face are so characteristic that I have ventured to call the passages where we can detect them *Chaucerisms*. Take the *Shipman's Tale* :—

> A Marchant whylom dwelled at Seint Denys,
> That riche was, for which men helde him wys.

Chaucer is at his work already.

When the merchant returns from abroad,

> His wyf ful redy mette him atte gate
> As she was wont of olde usage algate.

How quietly, almost inaudibly, Chaucer indicates that she had no very lively affection for her husband!

It is impossible to overpraise Chaucer's mastery of language. Here at the beginning, as it is commonly reckoned, of Modern English literature, is a treasury of perfect speech. We can trace his themes, and tell something of the events of his life. But where did he get his style—from which it may be said that English literature has been (in some respects) a long falling away?

What is the ordinary account? I do not wish to cite individual scholars, and there is no need. Take what can be gathered from the ordinary text-books—what are the current ideas? Is not this a fair statement of them?

"English was a despised language little used by the upper classes. A certain number of dreary works written chiefly for homiletic purposes, or in order to appeal to the humble people, are to be found in the half century before Chaucer. They are poor and flat and feeble, giving no promise of the new dawn. Then arose

the morning star! Chaucer adopted the despised English tongue and set himself to modify it, to shape it, to polish it, to render it fit for his purpose. He imported words from the French; he purified the English of his time from its dross; he shaped it into a fit instrument for his use."

Now I have no doubt that a competent philologist examining the facts could easily show that this account *must be* nonsense, from beginning to end. But even a literary critic can say something certain on the point—perhaps can even give aid by divination to the philologists, and tell them where it will best repay them to ply their pickaxes and spades.

No poet makes his own language. No poet introduces serious or numerous modifications into the language that he uses. Some, no doubt, coin words and revive them, like Spenser or Keats in verse, Carlyle or Sir Thomas Browne in prose. But least of all great English poets did Chaucer mould and modify the speech he found. The poets who take liberties with speech are either prophets or eccentrics. From either of these characters Chaucer was far removed. He held fast by communal and social standards for literary speech. He desired to be understood of the people. His English is plain, terse, homely, colloquial English, taken alive out of daily

speech. He expresses his ideal again and again, as when the Host asks what is the use of telling a tale that sends the hearers to sleep :—

> For certeinly, as that thise clerkes seyn,
> Where-as a man may have noon audience,
> Noght helpeth it to tellen his sentence.

The same admirable literary critic repeats Chaucer's creed when he instructs the Clerk :—

> Your termes, your colours, and your figures,
> Kepe hem in stoor till so be ye endite
> Heigh style, as whan that men to kinges write,
> Speketh so pleyn at this tyme, I yow preye,
> That we may understonde what ye seye.

Chaucer has expressed his views on the model literary style so clearly and so often, and has illustrated them so well in his practice, that no mistake is possible. His style is the perfect courtly style ; it has all the qualities of ease, directness, simplicity, of the best colloquial English, in short, which Chaucer recognised, three centuries before the French Academy, as the English spoken by cultivated women in society. His " facound," like Virginia's, " is ful womanly and pleyn." He avoids all "counterfeted terms," all subtleties of rhetoric, and addresses himself to the " commune intente."

Examples of his plain, terse brevity are easy to find. Take one, from the *Monk's Tale*—of

Hugelin of Pisa. (The imprisoned father bites his hands for grief; his young sons think it is for hunger):—

> His children wende that it for hunger was
> That he his armes gnew, and not for wo,
> And seyde, "Fader, do not so, allas!
> But rather ete the flessh upon us two;
> Our flesh thou yaf us, take our flesh us fro,
> And ete y-nough": right thus they to him seyde,
> And after that, with-in a day or two,
> They leyde hem in his lappe adoun, and deyde.

Now a style like this, and in this perfection, implies a society at the back of it. If we are told that educated people at the Court of Edward III spoke French and that English was a despised tongue, we could deny it on the evidence of Chaucer alone. His language was shaped for him, and it cannot have been shaped by rustics. No English style draws so much as Chaucer's from the communal and colloquial elements of the language. And his poems make it certain that from his youth up he had heard much admirable, witty talk in the English tongue.

The conclusion is that Chaucer's language is the language of his own day, like Gower's, but used by a quicker intelligence, and freer from repetition, artificial tags, flatnesses, etc. It was his good fortune to live at a time when bookish learning had not yet severed classes. He broke

loose from the literary fashions which at all time affect the "educated classes," and wrote the good English of peers and peasants. In this respect he comes near to the poets of Dryden's age.

This language was his own, not painfully acquired. Ease and skill of this kind is not attainable save in the birth tongue. Too much has been made of French; and of the dates of the "adoption" of English for public documents, law courts, schools. The English language had throughout a healthy, full-blooded existence. Chaucer had no adequate *literary* predecessors in English. But how partial and poor a thing the manuscript literature of the time compared with the riches of spoken lore, proverb, tale and romance! As Chaucer helps us, by his portrait of the age, to correct the formal annalists, so he helps us, by his writing, to a truer appreciation of literary history.

If there is to be any profitable investigation of Chaucer's language it must be remembered that he is at the *end* of an age, not at the beginning. His pupils could make nothing of him, and the Renaissance brought in ideals which made him unintelligible. Like Burns, Chaucer is a culmination and a close. We can understand Burns only by remembering his

debts to Fergusson, Ramsay, and scores of nameless poets. If we are to understand Chaucer, it must be by reference to a tribe of story-tellers, songsters, traffickers in popular lore and moral maxims who, because they did not relate themselves to paper, have almost passed, except by inference, from our ken.

IV

ON SOME WRITERS AND CRITICS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

i

Charles Lamb.

A Public Lecture on Charles Lamb! It is almost as if it would have hurt him. He hardly mentions fame or literary reputation in all his works. Barry Cornwall says he never heard him speak of it. He had no public ambition. Yet there is perhaps more intense personal feeling about him than about any other name in English Letters. No dead man is better loved. The great men bow to him, and vie for his sympathy. There is even jealousy about it.

Charles Lamb was not a poet, or essayist, or critic—he was a person. His works are a fortunate accident. They consist of :—

(1) Sayings.
(2) Letters.
(3) Poems and Essays.

—to be valued, I think, in that order. To anyone who lived so much in his affections as Lamb did, company is more than letters, and letters more than books.

There is an odd kind of privacy in Lamb's works—like *family* literature. His plays are like charades. He never took himself quite seriously, as we say, but "played at literature" with the glee of a child who dresses up and acts a part. He never dreamed of pitting himself against the gods of his idolatry. It is impossible to think of him as a "writer of books"—he stammers confidences, and has not the voice for public utterances. Sometimes he seems a kind of brownie, for fun and shy helpfulness: if you offer him wages, he will be off. At other times, by his sound sense and fearless clear judgment on human affairs, he seems as stalwart and robust as a grenadier.

To protect his sister, and to make a home for her (and his father), was Charles Lamb's chief business. "This was," says Barry Cornwall, "substantially his life. His actions, thoughts, and sufferings were all concentrated on this end. It was what he had to do; it was within his reach; and he did it."

The depression he suffered he spoke little of,

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and thought little of (as little as possible), but it kept him magically near to the understanding of all suffering. Sometimes a word escapes him. "My waking life," he wrote, "has much of the confusion, the trouble, and obscure perplexity of an ill dream. In the daytime I stumble upon dark mountains." Again, "When I am not walking, I am reading; I cannot sit and think. Books think for me." Yet he did not think tragically of himself. He took things as they were, simply, and for the most part, cheerfully. But in his criticism he is sometimes preternaturally quick to see suffering.

Lamb's sayings are not robust jests, like those of his friend (was it ?) to whom he said, "When *you* make a joke, it's no laughing matter." Some of them are light, irresponsible nonsense, and as nonsense is the purest form of jesting, so Lamb's is the best kind of nonsense. Others are extraordinarily incisive. It has been said that all his wit was gentle; it would be truer to say that it often cut, but did not hurt. In this matter he enjoyed the privileges of an angel—as those often do who wish no ill to anyone. He had a right to jest. Heartlessness he needed not to fear. The putting off responsibility and cheapening things by jests was impossible to

him. He did not offer a joke in lieu of a helping hand. But wherever the joke is realler and truer than the solemnity—there he jested.

Lamb's puns may seem to need an apology. The pun is almost dead. It was the fashion of Lamb's age ; to make the best pun of the evening was fame. Punsters of repute were hunted in society. Perhaps the best puns have all been made ; we have to get on as best we can with the inverted commonplace, the paradox, and the transferred initial consonant.

Lamb almost raised the pun to a higher power. His puns very often *mean* something. A pun is like one of those scientific toys that rotate in a vacuum : he almost made it do work.

There never was such a *taster* of literature as Lamb. He has fixed the values, and left it to more learned historians to arrange them, and talk of cause and effect.

It does not matter much when Great Authors die. Their lives were the process which gave us their Works. The death of Homer, or Voltaire, or Goethe, is like the death of a rich uncle ; not so much went out with them as went out with Charles Lamb. He left works, it is true, but he left something more fragrant and subtle than works—a memory ; so that his death is like

the death of a child, which can never happen (Adam Smith remarks) without rending asunder the heart of somebody. Even as an author he makes a more private appeal than almost all other authors, and keeps his ragged regiment of friends about him.

ii

William Hazlitt

Hazlitt gained the best part of his reputation as a critic of literature. Perhaps the interest felt in his life and works has been a little dulled by this. Criticism is not the exciting thing it was in the brave days when the critics were few and bold. It has become an industry of the workshop, carried on by those who look at new books, and look at nothing else. The greater part of critics are parasites, who, if nothing had been written, would find nothing to write. Until they meet with a live author, they cannot get to work ; and they are not unwilling, in case of necessity, to infest one another. Shakespeare says what he thinks of life ; Coleridge says what he thinks of Shakespeare ; the modern essayist says what he thinks of Coleridge ; we say what we think of the essayist—where is all this to stop ? It goes on until the parasite that completes the chain is too small to nourish another.

This objection to criticism does not apply to the great critics or to William Hazlitt. They move easily and sociably among great authors, as among their peers. They are always ready to

talk about human life ; books are only an excuse. They have a sure instinct for the elements: bread, and wine, and love, and war. There is nothing secondary or pedantic about an author who wrote *On Going a Journey*, *On People with One Idea*, *Of Persons One Would Wish to have Seen*, *On the Disadvantages of Intellectual Superiority*, *Why Distant Objects Please*, *On The Fear of Death*, *The Indian Jugglers*, *The Fight*. A lively intelligence will enjoy any of these themes, and will feel no disadvantage from a lack of technical education in the writer's craft. Yet the life and confessions of Hazlitt do throw light on what some may choose to call a technical question ; they reveal the methods and secrets of a great writer. Some great writers guard their secret jealously ; others vaingloriously and hypocritically profess to despise their art. Hazlitt has told us all he knew. *William Hazlitt : or How to Write Well* would be no bad title for the story of his life. To learn the lesson from him is no doubt impossible, for Hazlitt's work could have been produced by no temperament but his own. Yet we can see how he did it, and may learn from his experience some things of a wider application.

The outward events of Hazlitt's life tell little

enough of his history. Good writers are not a priesthood; if we investigate their genealogy and early education we can count on nothing but variety and surprise. He was born in 1778 at Maidstone in Kent; his father was a Unitarian minister of Irish Protestant descent, his mother the daughter of a Cambridgeshire yeoman. He came of a tough stock, and fighting blood tingled in his veins. His earliest memories were of travel rather than of home, for he passed some years of his early childhood in America, whither his father had gone to found a Unitarian church. At Wem, in Shropshire, the family settled on its return, and there Hazlitt was educated, partly by his father, partly in the local school. Schoolmasters, all but the wisest, do not appreciate a desultory and wilful boy; so that no tales have reached us of Hazlitt's passionate childhood. His own opinions on education are reflected, clearly enough, in his essay *On the Ignorance of the Learned.* This is what he says:—

"Any one who has passed through the regular gradations of a classical education, and is not made a fool by it, may consider himself as having had a very narrow escape. . . ."

Hazlitt's training as a painter was valuable to him, though he gave up painting in despair.

All his work is the work of an artist. He is never to be caught in a consumer's attitude,

> Contented if he might enjoy
> The things that others understand.

Such an attitude may be the best way of approaching the works of nature—it is one of the best ways. But to enjoy art without trying to understand it is to wallow in art, to be the rich man who cannot drive his motor-car, or cook an omelette, or write a readable letter. Hazlitt lived among the *makers*.

He was a slim, dark-haired man, with an eloquent face, expressive mouth, and quick, restless eye, which often evaded the direct gaze of others. His time was generally spent alone. He was passionate and shy, and awkward in society. A certain chill and formality of manner concealed the fires beneath. Leigh Hunt alludes to him in the essay *Shaking Hands*. "His fingers, half coming out and half retreating, seemed to think that you were going to do them a mischief; and when you got hold of them, the whole shake was on your side. . . . . This manual shyness is sometimes attributed to modesty, but never, we suspect, with justice. . . . It always implies a habit either of pride or distrust. We have met with two really kind men who

evinced this soreness of hand. Neither of them, perhaps, thought himself inferior to anybody about him, and both had good reason to think highly of themselves; but both had been sanguine men contradicted in their early hopes. There was a plot to meet the hand of one of them with a fish-slice, in order to show him the disadvantage to which he put his friends by that flat mode of salutation, but the conspirator had not the courage to do it."

In Hazlitt the cause was partly that he remained passionately true to his early theories and convictions, based on reasoning. He loved mankind on principle, and hated men in detail. His case is not uncommon. Certainly he was uncomfortably consistent and righteous. "I wish," said Lamb, "he would not quarrel with the world at the rate he does."

His way of life cannot be proposed to the young for imitation. "He always lived" (says one of his friends) "during the period of my intimacy with him in furnished lodgings. . . . He usually rose at from one to two o'clock in the day, scarcely ever before twelve; and if he had no work in hand, he would sit over his breakfast (of excessively strong black tea and a toasted French roll) till four or five in the afternoon—

silent, motionless, and self-absorbed, as a Turk over his opium-pouch; for tea served him precisely in this capacity. It was the only stimulant he ever took, and at the same time the only luxury. . . . To judge from its occasional effects upon myself, I should say that the quantity he drank of this tea produced ultimately a most injurious effect upon him. . . . His breakfast and tea were frequently the only meals he took till late at night, when he usually ate a hearty supper of hot meat. This he invariably took at a tavern."

As to his mode of composition the same friend says: "He never thought for half an hour beforehand as to what he should say on any given subject, or even as to the general manner in which he should treat it. . . . The total want of premeditation with which he could produce, in a singularly short space of time, an essay full of acute or profound thought, copious, with various and novel illustrations, and perfectly original views, couched in terse, polished, vigorous, and epigrammatic language, was quite extraordinary, and only to be explained by the two facts—first, that he never by choice wrote on any topic or question in which he did not, for some reason or other, feel a deep and personal interest; and secondly, because on all questions on which he did so feel, he had thought, meditated

and pondered, in the silence and solitude of his own heart, for years and years before he ever contemplated doing more than thinking of them."

The real life of Hazlitt is to be found in his works. Like all the best essayists (Montaigne, Cowley, Steele, Lamb, Stevenson) he writes of nothing but himself.

The use to which he put his youth (seemingly so futile and aimless) is described in the Essay *On Living to One's Self*. This stored his mind with images, memories, reflections on a vast array of topics. Writing gave him no trouble ; he had taken all that trouble years before. He had handled and arranged what was in his mind, and all of it is *alive :* it is feeling as well as thought. He is made up of loves and hates. His writing is fuller of zest in life and experience than the writings of other essayists. The Pleasure of Hating which he celebrates is the smaller part of this zest ; yet he would rather hate than be indifferent.

He has the great man's sympathy for his own childhood, and the vividest memories of it. Great men are less sleepy than other men. " If I see a row of cabbage plants," he says, " or of peas and beans coming up, I immediately think of those which I used so carefully to water

of an evening at Wem, when my day's tasks were done, and of the pain with which I saw them droop and hang down their leaves in the morning's sun. Again, I never see a child's kite in the air, but it seems to pull at my heart."

His capacity for enjoyment was endless. This keenness of pleasure is what makes him so great a critic. Barry Cornwall tells the story of how he prepared his lectures on Elizabethan Drama. Twelve volumes for six weeks and the lectures were written. All have the fine gusto of a first impression; yet the opinions have nothing hasty or unsound about them. The best critics are those who are not daunted by what is new and unfamiliar.

The hating which he celebrates was a lonely indulgence with him, like his political passions; and indeed, on this head, he does injustice to himself. "We can scarcely," he says, "hate anyone that we know. An acute observer complained, that if there was any one to whom he had a particular spite, and a wish to let him see it, the moment he came to sit down with him, his enmity was disarmed by some unforeseen circumstance. If it was a Quarterly Reviewer, he was in other respects like any other man. . . . If you come into a room where a man is, you

find, in general, that he has a nose upon his face. 'There's sympathy!' This alone is a diversion to your unqualified contempt. He is stupid, and says nothing, but he seems to have something in him when he laughs. You had conceived of him as a rank Whig or Tory—yet he talks upon other subjects. You knew that he was a virulent party writer; but you find that the man himself is a tame sort of animal enough. He does not bite. That's something. In short, you can make nothing of it."

The fact is that Hazlitt was a social being, baulked by fate and the difficulties of his own temper. He was a superb talker, as his precepts show. "To excel in conversation," he quotes with approval, "one must not be always striving to say good things; to say one good thing, one must say many bad, and more indifferent ones."

He had thought on all subjects that are suggested by experience of life. He is always real, goes straight to the point, without formalities or beating about the bush. Some essayists are physicians: they flatter and humour our nature to give it a chance of recovery. Hazlitt was a surgeon: his work is as wonderful and as terrifying to the protected popular imagination.

All poets have been haunted by the futility

of the trade in words. In his essay *On Thought and Action* Hazlitt comes nearer than any of them to a vindication of the poet. Keats preferred "fine doing" to "fine writing"; and, indeed, unless poets held this preference, they could not write worthily of their subjects. Who, then, is the greatest of all great men—in different kinds? "The one that we happen to be thinking of at the time."

"But still I conceive that a genius for action depends essentially on the strength of the will rather than on that of the understanding." Yet the pen has had more fame than the sword—you can buy immortality at a far cheaper rate as an author than as a statesman. Most of our statesmen are shadows; our authors live.

"Hume says rightly that more people think about Virgil and Homer (and that continually) than ever trouble their heads about Cæsar or Alexander. In fact, poets are a longer-lived race than heroes; they breathe more of the air of immortality. They survive more entire in their thoughts and acts. We have all that Virgil or Homer did, as much as if we had lived at the same time with them: we can hold their works in our hands, or lay them on our pillow, or put them to our lips. Scarcely a trace of what the others did is left upon the earth, so as

to be visible to common eyes. The one, the dead authors, are living men, still breathing and moving in their writings. The others, the conquerors of the world, are but the ashes in an urn. The sympathy (so to speak) between thought and thought is more intimate and vital than that between thought and action. Thought is linked to thought as flame kindles into flame: the tribute of admiration to the *manes* of departed heroism is like burning incense in a marble monument. . . . Words are the only things that last for ever."

There is some excusable exaggeration, but no fine writing here—nothing remarkable, indeed, but the justice of the thought. Hazlitt holds no brief for authors; no good author does. He is not a literary exquisite; he hates bookishness and the superstitions and vanities of learning. If you want to write well, he seems always to be saying, get near to the thing!

Hazlitt's verdict on culture may be read in the essay *On the Ignorance of the Learned.* If we could learn the truth conveyed in this essay—what a revolution! Where would popular education be? The heaviest charge against Culture is what it makes of women. It makes them write like men. But that cannot be sense or sincerity, for they are not like men.

The price of success in literature such as Hazlitt achieved is heavy. "You must flay yourself and sell your skin." The intense brooding, the abstraction, and irritability are little understood by those who think that thought about the dead (unlike thought about the living) is a kind of dreamy siesta, a lazy enjoyment. But thought is never that ; it is always a kind of athletic pain. He complains of it himself in his essay on Success in Life. The strain was great, and accounts for all the susceptibilities that brought Hazlitt so much misery. Lamb, who understood most things, understood this. He refused to quarrel with Hazlitt. When Southey exalted Lamb at Hazlitt's expense, Lamb replied publicly :—

" Protesting against much that he has written, and some things which he chooses to do ; judging him by his conversation, which I enjoyed so long and relished so deeply, or by his books, in those places where no clouding passion intervenes—I should belie my own conscience if I said less than that I think W. H. to be, in his natural and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing. So far from being ashamed of that intimacy which was betwixt us, it is my boast that I was able for so many years to have preserved it entire ; and I think

I shall go to my grave without finding, or expecting to find, such another companion."

His best epitaph was spoken by Hazlitt himself in the last words he uttered—" Well, I've had a happy life." No one can read Hazlitt's essays and not feel the truth of this. They are a compost of happiness, full of rapture and revelry and the delights of vision—full, indeed, of excruciating happiness, enough for ten ordinary lives. There is something to be said, after all, if you are courageous in your pleasures, for this kind of life—the life of one who for many years did nothing but think.

iii

Walter Savage Landor

Landor has many admirers, but few diligent readers. "I shall dine late; but the dining-room will be well lighted, the guests few and select." He did not add, perhaps he did not guess, that even those few guests would eat daintily and sparingly of what was provided, and would send away half the dishes untasted. I confess the extraordinary difficulty of reading Landor. One can lay him down at any time. His own coolness, quietude, selectiveness, infect his readers. They pick and choose.

> I strove with none, for none was worth my strife.
> Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art;
> I warm'd both hands before the fire of life;
> It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

Why that explanation—"for none was worth my strife"? This note of magniloquent egotism recurs again and again in Landor. It does not always spoil his work, but it gives him the air of a *virtuoso*. He is always "showing off." "It is I who make this poem," he says.

Milton, whom Landor put first among English poets, has the same strain. But it is less habitual in Milton, and his work is greater. Moreover,

it comes better from a poor, blind, and despised man, than from a rich, hale, and petulant one, whose real grievance can only be that his books are not eagerly asked for.

Landor could not throw himself wholly or for long into the interests, passions, and minds of others. His *Imaginary Conversations* are not in the least dramatic. How many people have been excited by the names, and disappointed by the talk! It ends by being like a bad dream; we are always back in Landor's library, and someone is always *prosing*.

Yet, in prose or verse, he is a Master, and I think may be called a great Teacher. It is a special talent in some. How it would have pleased Landor to have a little circle and be called "The Master!" How his affectionate nature would have blossomed! What a sad thing it is to find him alone in a foreign country during his later years, companioned by a yellow dog! He had a loving heart, and was born to tyrannise. He was kind and jealous, wilful and sensitive—an unhappy blend. Such people are dreaded by their fellows, and unless they are fortunate in acquiring slaves, lead a thwarted life. As slave owners they are happy, magnanimous and humane.

I am in doubt how far an Academic School of Literature can serve the interests of creation. The live stuff won't grow in the pots. But I cannot help wishing that there had been such a school, for Landor to be made head of it. How he would have basked on the throne! And how helpful he would have been! To anyone who acknowledged his loftiness he was all courtesy, tenderness, and consideration.

His doctrine is the best you can get. A School of Literature exists to follow his teaching —so far as it attempts the real work. Simplicity, parsimony, accuracy, gravity: these make a wonderful prose.

I love Landor even when he is as haughty and stuck-up as a child, and I love his short poems best of all his works. The *Heroic Idylls*, the *Hellenics* are written in a noble style, but they are Culture poems, they breathe of the study. It is in extract that the longer poems have lived. "I must read again Landor's *Julian*," Lamb wrote in 1815, "I have not read it some time. I think he must have failed in Roderick, for I remember nothing of him, nor of any distinct character as a character—only fine-sounding passages." It is quite odd how Landor's people slip out of the mind. Yet some

of their speeches are long remembered. The short, gem-like poems might be made the test of a lecture on style. They are single (trivial) occasions celebrated in lapidary verse.

His loveliest things are written when he forgets himself :—

> From you, Ianthe, little troubles pass
> Like little ripples down a sunny river ;
> Your pleasures spring like daisies in the grass,
> Cut down, and up again as soon as ever.

No one could have written that unless he had felt tenderness and sympathy for health and youth and all young unthinking creatures.

Landor will not raise his voice. If he feels strongly he is careful to choose words—I was going to say, no stronger than his feelings, but the truth is, a good deal weaker, or at least quieter, than his feelings. He never works up to a point, in verse or prose. He makes his point (tells the truth nakedly and severely), and then restores quiet by suggesting more peaceful considerations. This is so fixed a habit of his, that it is a mark of his style in verse or prose : his " dying fall."

To explain what I mean, let me quote a passage from De Quincey's *English Mail Coach* :—

" Figure to yourself, reader, the elements of

the case; suffer me to recall before your mind the circumstances of that unparalleled situation [*i.e.*, 'Now I am going to do my best.']. From the silence and deep peace of this saintly summer night—from the pathetic blending of this sweet moon-light, dawn-light, dream-light—from the manly tenderness of this fluttering, whispering, murmuring love—suddenly as from the woods and fields—suddenly as from the chambers of the air opening in revelation—suddenly as from the ground yawning at her feet, leaped upon her, with the flashing of cataracts, Death the crowned phantom, with all the equipage of his terrors, and the tiger-roar of his voice."

I do not wish to decry this: it is magnificent rhetoric, and like all good rhetoric is based on truth concerning the mortal estate. But it is rhetoric on tip-toe, and becomes falser as it rises. If rapidly oncoming death ever arches and roars like a wave, that is true only of the moment *before* the wave reaches and enswathes its victim. It is not really poetic thought, for it makes much of a momentary nervous crisis, but little of the real change.

Landor could never have written this. He is so jealous of losing the level of sanity and quiet that he sometimes overreaches himself on the other side, and depreciates the importance of

human emotion. Especially when he speaks of his own death, he uses a kind of inverted rhetoric : it is like suicide, a kind of egotism. See his lines : " Proud word you never spoke," " A provident and wakeful fear," " Fate, I have askt few things of thee." Certainly he studied to be quiet. Yet, in this matter of his death, he is thinking more of his own dignity and self-abnegation and peace, than of the grief of his friends. These poems have the stately good manners of pride ; they are not poems of passion, not for a moment self-forgetful, yet their charm (to me at least) is irresistible. They culminate in a four-lined poem as beautiful as his best :—

> Death stands above me, whispering low
> I know not what into my ear :
> Of his strange language all I know
> Is, there is not a word of fear.

The same dying fall is used in " The Death of Artemidora " in the *Hellenics*, and very beautifully in the prose account of the death of Acciaioli given by Boccaccio in the *Pentameron*. If you come to taste writing like that it makes coarser effects vulgar. There is a ceremonial gravity about it. Landor has an unerring feeling for impressions that the marble will take. He seems almost incapable of being deceived by pleasure or passion or anything but pride.

"What I write is not written on slate; and no finger, not that of Time himself, who dips it in the mist of years, can efface it."

> Well I remember how you smiled
> To see me write your name upon
> The soft sea-sand. "*O! what a child!*
> *You think you're writing upon stone!*"
>
> I have since written what no tide
> Shall ever wash away; what men
> Unborn shall read o'er ocean wide
> And find Ianthe's name again.

Landor always thought he was writing on stone, because he wrote nothing extravagant, excessive, exuberant. In that sense it will endure; it is pure English carefully graved, and will take long to grow old. But his work is as immortal as a graveyard.

Landor cared little for philosophy and much for history, which he saw as a great and stately pageant. He liked the great *shapes* of historical events.

A large number of his *Conversations* deal with literary criticism, and it crops up everywhere in others. Some have complained of the minuteness of his criticism, but this is what makes Landor so good a teacher. In these minute criticisms he always excels.

Landor's greatest prose passages might be

collected in an anthology—"The Four Last Things." There is nothing new in what he has to say, and nothing subtle; his mind is not swift or alert. But give him a grave theme where there is nothing new to tell, and he surpasses himself.

"There are no fields of amaranth on this side of the grave; there are no voices, O Rhodopè, that are not soon mute, however tuneful; there is no name, with whatever emphasis of passionate love repeated, of which the echo is not faint at last."

Here he verges on poetry, and allows himself, no doubt wittingly, to drop into blank verse at the end. But how beautifully the sentence rolls and rises and subsides!

Landor, then, belongs to that very small company of English men of letters who are born Academicians; like Ben Jonson and Gray. Their works are stiff with scholarship. They are not congenial to our soil. The English doctrine is wider:—

> There are five and thirty ways
> Of constructing tribal lays,
> And every single one of them is right.

Landor's is one way, and not the worst. If you take him for a master the weakest passage in the worst thing you write will be immeasurably better than the poorest things in Shakespeare.

iv

Thomas De Quincey

When I first came across De Quincey's works I wondered that more was not made of him. That time is past. His faults are of the kind that grow upon you. But something remains.

Who would have thought De Quincey had a large family of sons and daughters? They are not so real as his dreams.

Most of the incidents and adventures of De Quincey's life we know from himself. But he mixes dream and fable, or seems to. In the tissue of fact and fancy where does the dream begin? Did a real Malay present himself to De Quincey in the Lakes? How far has his imagination touched his memory of wanderings in Oxford Street? Can we trust his account of his adventures with the authorities at Oxford? All these are difficulties. We have no independent accounts, confirming his tales. His contemporaries are silent. He seems to have flitted by.

The heaviest stone that can be thrown at De Quincey is his treatment of the men of letters and poets whose acquaintance he enjoyed.

True, he was younger. True, also, he had been brought up in a kind of superstition which treats famous or notable people, especially writers, as meteors and monsters. Yet we cannot avoid the conclusion that he was not fit company for Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Lamb, who, in spite of their differences, were fit and trustworthy company for one another. He forced himself on them. He took notes of their private life, and noticed the wrong things. He was an Interviewer, and worse, for he did not announce his intentions.

The things he tells are amusing, and obviously true; yet that does not acquit him. He was a man of genius, he was in their company, and might have associated with them on equal terms; but he chose to watch, and to tell. He was a newspaper man who got into good company by mistake. He seems not to have counted. Charles Lamb and Wordsworth simply do not mention him.

One of De Quincey's irresistible attractions is his intellectual vitality. He is always alive, inquisitive, interested in all things in this world. He is learned in all curious, out-of-the-way, cabbalistic things. "Every book is interesting." When we see the jackdaw collections that make

up his essays, we think, "who could have believed that all these things could be found in a garden?"—long-lost utensils, bits of tinsel, shining buttons. His essays are a Paradise of odds and ends.

The subtlety and discernment of De Quincey's mind are seen in the many admirable definitions and distinctions that he has given to criticism, *e.g.*, between the Literature of knowledge and the Literature of power; the Cookery-book and *Paradise Lost.* The Literature of knowledge corresponds to Lamb's "Books which are no books," but Lamb characteristically treats it as a matter of instinct.

The weak side of De Quincey's activity is that his mind gets overexcited and races, like the screw of a steamer out of the water.

He can hardly narrate. When he tries, the real narration is scattered here and there like the paper in a paper-chase. He is always hunting counter. The structure of his essays is a kind of game of cross-catch; the rule is that you must follow anything that comes between you and your quarry.

The inability to let anything alone, to refrain from discussion and digression, amounts in

De Quincey to painful incontinence. It is the Dream Structure. Opium perhaps explains it.

The finest part of De Quincey's work is his so-called "impassioned prose." This has a logic of its own, a kind of musical logic. It all began with his great success, his chief book, the *Confessions*, in which the best thing is the Opium Dreams. The book made a great impression, and thereafter De Quincey applied the same method, consciously and intentionally, to many topics. But in these later attempts, *Suspiria de Profundis*, and *The English Mail Coach*, there is not the same groundwork, and there is a suspicion sometimes of fine writing.

The dream-tendency was strong in De Quincey long before he touched opium: "I," he says, "whose disease it was to meditate too much and to observe too little." He tells of his childish reveries; of the long trance he fell into at the side of his sister's death-bed; and of the passionate life he led among creatures of his fancy, the Kingdoms of Gombroon and Tigrosylvania. The grief he felt when his brother announced that the Gombroonians had tails! His brother suggested that Thomas should order the whole nation to sit down for six hours a day, to begin to wear off their tails. "If you don't

like it, you may abdicate." "But this connection with my poor subjects had grown up so slowly and so genially, in the midst of struggles so constant against the encroachments of my brother and his rascally people; we had suffered so much together; and the filaments connecting them with my heart were so . . . inseverable, that I abated nothing of my anxiety on their account."

To the end of his life De Quincey was a kind of King of Gombroon. He lived among ideas, and processions of images, and trains of thought. His dreams mixed with his waking life; and his sharpest pains and greatest raptures were dream-pains and dream-delights.

V

Thomas Love Peacock

There is nothing misanthropical about Peacock. He admires, and loves. All that is simple and matter of affection, and private, is dear to him. He laughs at idealists, and makers of systems. Yet—here is the strange thing—he is not common sense against the idea. He has, deep down in him, a great love for ideas. How easy to make fun of Rousseau, Mme de Genlis, Thomas Day—all that world of theory which belongs to the French Revolution! Peacock does make fun of it, but he has been touched by it. The two most virtuous characters in *Melincourt* are Sir Oran Haut-ton and Sylvan Forester—separate embodiments of the natural man of the revolutionary philosopy. Life in the woods—life in a cottage with a garden—Peacock is almost passionate about these. Yet he praises them chiefly in conversations that take place round tables amply supplied with old silver and madeira.

He was the friend of Shelley, and a wine-drinker—perhaps that best describes him. His friendship for Shelley had in it some kinship of ideas, not a merely personal liking. Indeed,

Peacock was himself something of a theorist. He loved the consistency of the Latin mind; he adored logic; he loved a rebel, if the rebel was in earnest, as Shelley was. His ridicule of the other poets of that time turns for the most part on a single point, that they have given up their youthful creeds and have settled down in comfort.

Talk gives the structure of his books. They are a world of talk. "It's all very fine talking," people say, "but is it practical?" In Peacock the standard is reversed. "It's all very practical, but is it fine talking?" The atmosphere of conviviality in the novels keeps the differences from bursting into drama. When the dispute waxes hot someone says, "Buz the bottle."

Allow for the difference between a persecuted preacher of the gospel and a prosperous clerk in the Examiner's office of the East India Company, and Peacock's work is a kindly *Pilgrim's Progress*. He gives his characters the same kind of names. Bunyan would have said it was a Pilgrim's Progress by Mr Byends of the City of Fairspeech.

Type in Peacock hardly ever passes into character. His work continually borders on character drawing, but he values the play of

wit and theory too well. The whole world is a *salon* to him.

If there are any of Peacock's persons who are felt to be living human characters, they are to be found among his young ladies and his drunkards. The first are real, perhaps because they are pleasant and sensible (which few of the men are), perhaps because the author takes fewer freedoms in the portraiture. It is difficult to say exactly how they make so pleasant an impression—probably by their freedom from censoriousness, and by the good will of the other characters towards them. A novelist may learn something from the wisdom of Lord Halifax in his *Advice to a Daughter:*

"The triumph of wit is to make your good nature subdue your censure, to be quick in seeing faults and slow in exposing them. You are to consider that the invisible thing called a *Good Name* is made up of the breath of numbers that speak well of you; so that if by a disobliging word you silence the meanest, the gale will be less strong which is to bear up your esteem. And though nothing is so vain as the eager pursuit of empty applause, yet to be well thought of and to be kindly used by the world is like a glory about a woman's head; 'tis a perfume

she carrieth about with her and leaveth wherever she goeth; 'tis a charm against ill-will. Malice may empty her quiver, but cannot wound; the dirt will not stick, the jests will not take."

Something of this charm is to be found in Peacock's heroines, so to call them.

George Meredith was Peacock's son-in-law, and learned more from Peacock than from any other writer; in his characters of women especially, and his convivial scenes.

There is, it has often been remarked, a certain Gallic quality in Peacock's wit. It is gay and polished, and usually subtle. Our satirists are commonly heavy-weight prize-fighters. Our irony is often as strong as cheese. He has the spirit of wise mischief, like M. Anatole France.

vi

The Periodical Reviewers

Francis Jeffrey was a shrewd, affectionate, kindly, sensible man. He did not bother his head with poetry. When he read a poem, he felt that he had seen this kind of thing before. He had a loyal heart, and he liked best those poems which exactly resembled those he already knew. He is never tired of appealing to common sense and old usage. A departure from old usage he calls "mannerism." Take his quarrel with Wordsworth's characters. It amounts to this, that they are not common. "A village schoolmaster, for instance, is a pretty common poetical character." "A frail damsel," again, "is a character common enough in all poems." "The sports of childhood, and the untimely death of promising youth, is also a common topic for poetry." "Love, and the fantasies of lovers, have afforded an ample theme to poets of all ages." Yet Wordsworth's treatment of these characters and themes is not identical, Jeffrey complains, with their treatment by others. Jeffrey's standard is very simple and very incurious. His characters are the characters of the stage. If you say *Enter a tramp*, or a schoolmaster, or a schoolboy, or a lover, Jeffrey feels that he knows all about

each of them, and is indignant if they are not traditionally dressed. His attitude to human life and thought is curiously *outward.* He seems never to have contemplated the possibility that he might be a tramp, or a schoolmaster, or a lover, himself.

The Edinburgh Review was founded and conducted by young men: Sydney Smith, aged thirty, Jeffrey, twenty-eight, Horner and Brougham, twenty-four. It has all the zest of a conspiracy, and of a reprisal of Edinburgh on London. Their spirits are highest in attack; yet they established themselves firmly by their moderation and sober judgment on politics, foreign affairs, and general literature. The early numbers of the *Edinburgh* are dull and judicious. If they had not stumbled on some great poets they would have forfeited more than half their fame. They are like those Roman Governors and Judges who were called upon by the irony of history to sit in judgment on the early Christians. They enforced the police laws dutifully and whole-heartedly, without a gleam of suspicion, when they said "next case," that in the course of a few hours they had enrolled their names indelibly on the history of the world. It is a sobering thought that any one of us, any official at least, might at any time have his

stupid daily work thrust into the glare of universal history. The only comfort I can find is that the chance of this is small: it is long odds on our continued obscurity.

Criticism in the earlier 19th century lagged behind poetry. When poetry is moving it always does. The *Edinburgh* conspirators were young, and the young might be expected to catch the lilt of a new poetry. They did not, partly because they were proud of their office, partly because they were out of touch with the creative in literature. Their hearts were with the lawyers, and bankers, and ministers of state, with the magistrates, and statisticians, and economists, and moralists, rather than with the poets. But there is the joy of youth in their onslaughts. It is difficult not to like anyone who is so incurably gay as these early critics.

Look at Brougham's *Edinburgh* review of Byron's *Hours of Idleness* (Jan. 1808).

"It is a sort of privilege of poets to be egotists; but they should 'use it as not abusing it'; and particularly one who piques himself (though, indeed, at the ripe age of nineteen) of being 'an infant bard'—('The artless Helicon I boast is youth;')—should either not know, or should seem not to know, so much about his own

ancestry. Besides a poem above cited on the family seat of the Byrons, we have another of eleven pages, on the self-same subject. . . . There is a good deal also about his maternal ancestors, in a poem on Lachin-y-gair, a mountain where he spent part of his youth, and might have learnt that *pibroch* is not a bagpipe, any more than duet means a fiddle. . . .

"But whatever judgment may be passed on the poems of this noble minor, it seems we must take them as we find them, and be content; for they are the last we shall ever have from him. He is at best, he says, but an intruder into the groves of Parnassus; he never lived in a garret, like thoroughbred poets; and 'though he once roved a careless mountaineer in the Highlands of Scotland,' he has not of late enjoyed this advantage. Moreover, he expects no profit from his publication; and whether it succeeds or not, 'it is highly improbable, from his situation and pursuits hereafter,' that he should again condescend to become an author. Therefore, let us take what we get and be thankful. What right have we poor devils to be nice? We are well off to have got so much from a man of this Lord's station, who does not live in a garret, but 'has the sway' of Newstead Abbey. Again, we say, let us be thankful; and, with honest

Sancho, bid God bless the giver, nor look the gift horse in the mouth."

The diabolical cleverness of this is that it is true—as true as any account of one person by another can be without a grain of sympathy. Byron did affect to regard literature as a casual pastime. He did stand on his rank—no one could ever mistake him for an untitled person. Everyone knows the sequel. Byron was a first-class fighting man ; and this treatment directed his genius to war. In *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* he fought against all for his own hand and triumphed. Five years later he was the most popular poet England had ever seen.

Perhaps Brougham did a real service to Byron and to the nation. The *Monthly Review*, in all innocence, criticised the *Hours of Idleness* favourably. " He has received talents, and is accountable for the use of them. We trust that he will render them beneficial to man, and a source of real gratification to himself in declining age." Byron liked this better, and later wrote for the *Monthly Review*. But if all the criticism of his *Hours* had been like this he could not have found it very stimulating. This view of poetry as a kind of contributory old-age pension might apply to *Il Penseroso ;* it can hardly be made to fit *Don Juan.*

The almost equally famous review of Tennyson's 1832 volume by Croker[1] in the *Quarterly*, did good of another kind; it quickened a better criticism than Croker's—Tennyson's criticism of himself. He omitted many of the passages ridiculed, altered many, and defiantly let others stand. Croker's review is very amusing and, except to the poet, very useless. But it is colder and craftier than Brougham's attack on Byron, and indeed is cowardly. The passage in which Keats is praised and an apology offered for past mistakes of judgment is written in a studiously ironical vein. Tennyson is called "another and a brighter star of that galaxy or *milky way* of poetry of which the lamented Keats was the harbinger." This might be taken (and has been taken) for a genuine apology. On the other hand, if the ultimate judgment had gone against Keats, the reviewer could always claim that his praise was studied insolence veiled in ironical speech.

Part of the reviewer's satire is a display of his own ignorance of the world out-of-doors. It is as if he had never listened to anything except to talk in an office, and had never looked at

[1] Raleigh had written at first "by Lockhart," then queried "by Croker?", and finally decided that Croker it was. Tradition assigned the review to Lockhart.

anything except a sheet of paper. So he ridicules these lines :—

> And through damp holts, newflushed with may
> Ring sudden *laughters* of the jay.

Mr Croker had never heard a jay.

The Lady of Shalott begins thus :—

> On either side the river lie
> Long fields of barley and of rye,
> That clothe the wold and *meet the sky.*

The reviewer quotes these lines and italicises the last three words. " Every one knows," he seems to say, " that the sky is above us and the ground beneath us ; if the fields meet the sky, where do we come in ? " Mr Croker had never looked at the fields, or at the sky, which, like a pie-crust, is always most interesting at the edge.

Tennyson did not alter these lines. But he altered too much. Poets are a sensitive race, and the importance of Croker's criticisms is to be found in the many changes that Tennyson made in the passages criticised. The verse describing the Lady of Shalott's song as she floated down the river to Camelot ran thus :—

> A long-drawn carol, mournful, holy,
> She chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
> Till her eyes were darkened *wholly*,
> And her smooth face *sharpened slowly*,
> Turned to towered Camelot.

Croker underlined "wholly" and "sharpened slowly." Most of the words he underlined vanished from the next edition. These two lines became :—

> Till her blood was frozen slowly,
> And her eyes were darken'd wholly.

Yet the original line ("her smooth face sharpened slowly"), like many of the lines Tennyson altered, has the grace of early Italian art. The stones that he pulled out of his building were foundation stones for the later Pre-Raphaelite School of Poetry.

For the most part Croker had only to point a finger at one of Tennyson's verses, and the poet altered it. His subtle method of attack was to print a few words, or a few lines, in italics, thereby implying that every one would at once recognise the absurdity of these words or lines. The severity of this trial cannot be questioned. If a gentleman of good position points at your boots, and all the company laughs, the first wild natural impulse is to go home and change them. *The Miller's Daughter* was heavily altered throughout because Mr Croker had pointed at it. The later version has perhaps more of Tennyson's verbal skill, but is less simple and less convincing. Some few of the ridiculed verses remain unchanged. Here is one :—

The meal-sacks on the whiten'd floor,
The dark round of the dripping wheel,
The very air about the door
Made misty with the floating meal.

The last two lines are printed in italics by the *Quarterly*, with an added exclamation mark. Mr Croker had never seen a mill. Tennyson had; and he stuck to the truth of his evidence. But he altered some very pleasant simple pieces of description. This, for instance, of the miller, vanished :—

He looked so jolly and so good
While fishing in the mill-dam water,
I laughed to see him as he stood,
And dreamt not of the miller's daughter.

Or this, describing the poet's first sight of the miller's daughter :—

Remember you that pleasant day
When after roving in the woods,
('Twas April then) I came and lay
Beneath those gummy chestnut buds?

A water-rat from off the bank
Plunged in the stream. With idle care,
Down-looking through the sedges rank,
I saw your troubled image there.

If you remember, you had set
Upon the narrow casement edge
A long green box of mignonette,
And you were leaning on the ledge.

"The poet's truth to nature," says Croker, "in his 'gummy' chestnut buds, and to art in that 'long green box' of mignonette—and that masterly touch of likening the first intrusion of love into the virgin bosom of the miller's daughter to the plunging of a water-rat into the mill-dam—these are beauties which, we do not fear to say, equal anything even in Keats." This is quite unfair and quite unintelligent, but Tennyson was frightened by it. We must not blame him. If a poet is frightened by a reviewer, let us remember that the great Duke of Marlborough was habitually frightened by his Duchess—a very similar case. Anyhow, the water-rat plunged into oblivion, and its part in the drama was assigned to a trout, which, because it is connected with a gentlemanly sport, and because we eat it and praise it, is a much more respectable animal. The recast version is much longer than the original (twenty-eight lines in place of twelve) and much less simple:—

> But Alice, what an hour was that,
> When after roving in the woods
> ('Twas April then), I came and sat
> Below the chestnuts, when their buds
> Were glistening to the breezy blue;
> And on the slope, an absent fool,
> I cast me down, nor thought of you,
> But angled in the higher pool.

A love-song I had somewhere read,
An echo from a measured strain,
Beat time to nothing in my head
From some odd corner of the brain.
It haunted me, the morning long,
With weary sameness in the rhymes,
The phantom of a silent song,
That went and came a thousand times.

Then leapt a trout. In lazy mood
I watched the little circles die;
They passed into the level flood,
And there a vision caught my eye;
The reflex of a beauteous form,
A glowing arm, a gleaming neck,
As when a sunbeam wavers warm
Within the dark and dimpled beck.

For you remember, you had set,
That morning, on the casement-edge
A long green box of mignonette,
And you were leaning from the ledge.

The poet has bolstered up his meaning against the assault of his reviewer, and of his original properties has saved only the long green box.

Croker, of course, was clever; with that cleverness which, more infallibly than any degree or form of stupidity, cuts the mind off from the appreciation of poetry. Let us be fairer to him than he was to Tennyson, and enjoy his performances on the trapeze. They have been much enjoyed. Of *The Palace of Art* he quotes one stanza :—

Isaiah, with fierce Ezekiel,
Swarth Moses by the Coptic sea,
Plato, Petrarca, Livy and Raphael,
And eastern Confutzee.

"We can hardly suspect the very original mind of Mr Tennyson," he says, "to have harboured any recollections of that celebrated Doric idyll, *The Groves of Blarney*, but certainly there is a strong likeness between Mr Tennyson's list of pictures and the Blarney collection of statues :—

Statues growing that noble place in,
All heathen goddesses most rare,
Homer, Plutarch, and Nebuchadnezzar,
All standing naked in the open air!"

He also quotes the poet's description, which has now vanished from his collected works, of his *Darling Room* :—

Oh darling room, my heart's delight;
Dear room, the apple of my sight;
With thy two couches, soft and white,
There is no room so exqui*site*;
No little room so warm and bright,
Wherein to read, wherein to write.

"In such a dear *little* room a narrow-minded scribbler would have been content with *one* sofa, and that one he would probably have covered with black mohair, or red cloth, or a good striped chintz; how infinitely more char-

acteristic is white dimity!—'tis as it were a type of the purity of the poet's mind."

This is a good example of the vein of the omnipotent *Reviews*.

The Reviews did not kill Keats, but why was *The Prelude* published in 1850? Why was *The Excursion* not completed? Good poets are sane men, and are dependent on the understanding of their fellows. Some great men have continued their work amidst execration or neglect. But they have to battle with their suspicion that perhaps the world is right and they are mad. Why go on making what nobody wants?

There was hardly any criticism of contemporary poetry in the early decades of last century except in these accredited journals; the reviews were anonymous and official, expressing or purporting to express a public judgment. Southey's contributions to *The Quarterly* were habitually edited and altered. The tragic story of Lamb's single *Quarterly* article—a review of Wordsworth's *Excursion*—is well known. "What you will see in the *Quarterly*," he wrote to Wordsworth, "is a spurious one, which Mr Baviad Gifford has palmed upon it for mine. . . . I cannot give you an idea of what he has done to it out of spite at me. . . . More than a third

of the substance is cut away, and that not all from one place, but *passim*, so as to make utter nonsense. Every warm expression is changed for a nasty cold one . . . . putting his damnd shoemaker phraseology (for he was a shoemaker) in stead of mine, which has been tinctured with better authors than his ignorance can comprehend." Lamb kept no copy, so his essay on *The Excursion* has perished. The printed article bears hardly a trace of him.

There was thus a complete breach between the two strains and bodies of criticisms—the official and the amateur. The official criticism devoted itself very largely to attacking the Romantics. The new criticism, of sympathy and understanding, was the work of amateurs, such as Hazlitt and Lamb. The official strain was brilliantly continued by Macaulay, and many later bright pens. Macaulay's review of Robert Montgomery (1830), with all its cleverness and pomp and bluster about public duty, is perhaps the classic example of this kind of criticism, its merits and its faults.

> The soul, aspiring, pants its source to mount,
> As streams meander level with their fount.

He calls this "the worst similitude in the world." "No stream meanders, or can possibly

meander, level with its fount." "If streams did meander level with their founts, no two motions can be less like each other than that of meandering level and that of mounting upwards." I am sorry; it prevents my perfect appreciation of Macaulay's criticism that I can't help understanding what poor Montgomery is trying to say.

The lovers of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, were kept down and silenced while this tyranny lasted. But they talked and wrote to one another, and their opinions became the orthodoxy of the next age. I am not sure that there is anything that was not inevitable in all this. Every age tries to keep new poets at bay. This is a mark of respect to poetry. It is not a small claim that an original poet makes. He claims to dominate your thought, to possess your imagination, to impose on you a new vision of things, to haunt, to startle, and waylay. If a poet is acclaimed at once as one of the greatest, his title is open to suspicion. These things are not done so easily. A poet must wrestle with his own generation and convince them. He has to teach them to see what it is hard for them to see, things that are hidden by being fixed for ever in the most conspicuous place. Spenser did not think it a light task :—

How vainely then doe ydle wits invent,
That beautie is nought else but mixture made
Of colours faire, and goodly temp'rament
Of pure complexions, that shall quickly fade
And passe away, like to a sommers shade,
Or that it is but comely composition
Of parts well measurd, with meet disposition.

Hath white and red in it such wondrous powre,
That it can pierce through th' eyes unto the hart,
And therein stirre such rage and restlesse stowre,
As nought but death can stint his dolours smart?
Or can proportion of the outward part,
Move such affection in the inward mynd,
That it can rob both sense and reason blynd?

. . . . . .

But ah, beleeve me, there is more then so
That workes such wonders in the minds of men.
I that have often prov'd, too well it know;
And who so list the like assayes to ken,
Shall find by tryall, and confesse it then,
That Beautie is not, as fond men misdeeme,
An outward shew of things, that onely seeme.

And again :—

Vouchsafe then, O thou most almightie Spright,
From whom all guifts of wit and knowledge flow,
To shed into my breast some sparkling light
Of thine eternall Truth, that I may show
Some litle beames to mortall eyes below,
Of that immortall beautie, there with thee,
Which in my weake distraughted mynd I see.

This is as good an account as I can find of what is somewhat pompously called "the true function of criticism." So taken, it illustrates also

how criticism of literature cannot be divorced from criticism of life. You must know something about the truth before you can find it in a book.

The reputation of a great poet is never established by the labours of one man or one group of men. It is a composite; it emerges from long discussion, and is very slowly shaped. Anyone who has strong likings and tries to express them reasonably is a contributor to the ultimate verdict. The value of such criticism may be proved, I think, from a common experience. The chief debt I owe to critics of literature is a debt of thankfulness for their quotations. You may have read the book from which the quotation is taken, but your mind glided off it; when you are presented with it afresh, in a new setting, it comes home to you as it never did before. Get someone who likes an author better than you do, to read you some justifying passages. It is a good lesson; and, moreover, it is a good test, for the weaker authors often fail under it, and their admirers are kept turning the pages to find what it was that captured them. It is by a prolonged ordeal of quotation that fame is created, not by the wit of a young man paid to write an article.

HIS memory was an unfailing delight to Macaulay. He had no need to think. He could shut his eyes and turn over the pages of the past. He could not walk through London without reviving in his mind all the notable events that had occurred in this place or in that. He would pour out anecdotes about every street and square and court and alley. But for this gift, he says, "My mind would have rusted by gazing vacantly at the shop-windows."

This "castle-building," this romancing with the past, was his method in literature. He worked by reminiscence, not by imagination. Yet the memory exercises a choice, and Macaulay's instinctive preference was for action, drama, the pageant of life. The streets of London were too quiet for him. He repeopled them with old insurrections, elopements, murders, processions, shows. What he chooses is always what appeals to the eye, by its magnificence or oddity. He did not observe the outer world; its indications were too faint and uncertain. He preferred the theatrical world, so to call it, of old story and old romance.

This principle of selection—the choice of the picturesque—is the principle of his *History* and his *Essays*. But the picturesque is not always the significant. Macaulay's task is to make it significant. He sets himself to express his own verdict on historical events and characters, and to force it on the reader by his pictures. "He reads twenty books," said Thackeray, "to write a sentence." What he sought in the twenty books was the recondite touch of description—to give life to a portrait or vividness to an event, and of these he collected only the most striking.

Take his Titus Oates :—

"His short neck, his legs uneven, the vulgar said, as those of a badger, his forehead low as that of a baboon, his purple cheeks, and his monstrous length of chin, had been familiar to all who frequented the courts of law." This is taken chiefly from Dryden's satire in *Absalom and Achitophel*—yet Dryden says more of *character* :—

> Yet, *Corah*, thou shalt from Oblivion pass ;
> Erect thy self thou Monumental Brass :
> High as the Serpent of thy Metal made,
> While Nations stand secure beneath thy shade.

Take his Robert Ferguson :—

"His broad Scotch accent, his tall and lean figure, his lantern jaws, the gleam of his sharp eyes which were always overhung by his wig, his

cheeks inflamed by an eruption, his shoulders deformed by a stoop, and his gait distinguished from that of other men by a peculiar shuffle, made him remarkable wherever he appeared."

Or the Retreat of William III's troops from the Battle of Landen :—

The French were commanded by the Duke of Luxemburg. Among 120,000 soldiers "the two feeblest in body were the hunchbacked dwarf who urged forward the fiery onset of France, and the asthmatic skeleton who covered the slow retreat of England."

Thus is history made as captivating as a show of monsters.

Take his Samuel Johnson :—

"The memory of Johnson keeps many of his works alive." (What is that memory ?) "The old philosopher is still among us in the brown coat with the metal buttons and the shirt which ought to be at wash, blinking, puffing, rolling his head, drumming with his fingers, tearing his meat like a tiger, and swallowing his tea in oceans."

No man would be safe from this method. Any man with a slight hesitation in his speech, a peculiarity of gesture, an odd way of eating his food, a wart on his face, or a cast in his eye, can be made a wonder or a monster by Macaulay.

His judgment is often like the judgment of children, who see this and see no more. Marriage, for instance, and its meaning in a man's life, does not yield itself easily to this pictorial method. But Macaulay has nothing to contribute on Johnson's marriage but a description of Mrs Johnson, whom he calls a "tawdry, painted grandmother," "a short, fat, coarse woman, painted half an inch thick, dressed in gaudy colours, and fond of exhibiting provincial airs and graces." . . . "David Garrick, who was one of (Johnson's) pupils, used . . . to throw the best company of London into convulsions of laughter by mimicking the endearments of this extraordinary pair."

It is true; and Garrick's monkey-tricks, being more picturesque than a sober statement, are accepted for a sufficient criticism. But what becomes of the whole world of feeling revealed in Johnson's own Remains, and of Mrs Johnson's remark, when first she saw Johnson: "This is the most sensible man that I ever saw in my life"?

Macaulay's immense reading supplied him, then, with a great store of vivid pictorial patches. He collected them from forgotten pamphlets, old poems, diaries, journals, and used them to brighten his pages. But the pictures are not the

work of imagination. Imagination helps us to think. Macaulay's pictures are not an aid to thought—they were not so used by himself. His mind was not a searching or questioning mind.

There was nothing new or startling, nothing subtle or impressive, in the opinions that Macaulay held, or in the body of his thought. In the hands of an ordinary writer these opinions and this thought would have been commonplace. Macaulay makes them striking by the art with which he enforces them. The problem of style was for him a problem solely of expression, not of thought. He is never struggling to express himself—that is easily done; all his effort is to impress others. To this end he elaborates a masterly rhetoric.

One of his devices is well known. He frightens and dazzles the reader by the display of his stores of learning, and by his assertion of what it is the duty of others to know. "Every schoolboy knows," says Macaulay; and the things that every schoolboy knows make a far-fetched and opulent collection. There are very few facts contained in books which a man need be ashamed of not knowing. Those he does not know have not come his way perhaps, or have not been connected

with his chief interests, and would have been of little use to him. But the terrible phrase does its work. Macaulay's schoolboy, of course, never existed; he is an overfed phantasm, an engine cunningly contrived to produce shame and diffidence in the reader.

Crabb Robinson says of Macaulay, "He showed a minute knowledge of subjects not introduced by himself." This was the architect of Indian education.

The main feature of Macaulay's art is to be found in his use of the element of surprise. In his hands everything is made to seem astonishing and unprecedented. He is rich in all the requisite rhetorical figures—antithesis, contrast, hyperbole, climax. His exaggerations go beyond the expression of his own feeling (though that is strong), and are something of a calculated attack on the reader's feelings. He does not, like Charles Lamb, gently insinuate his own opinions, or infect with his own sympathies. He works in dogmatic superlatives, and carries the position by assault. Rymer is "the worst critic that ever lived." Robert Montgomery's simile :—

> The soul, aspiring, strives its source to mount,
> As streams meander level with their fount,

is "the worst similitude in the world." Of

Addison he says : " After full inquiry and impartial reflection, we have long been convinced that he deserved as much love and esteem as can be justly claimed by any of our infirm and erring race." Laud is " a poor creature who never did, said, or wrote anything indicating more than the ordinary capacity of an old woman."

He is fond of discovering amazing incongruities and contradictions in human nature. Pope gives the method :—

> The brightest, wisest, meanest of mankind.
>
> The best good man with the worst-natured Muse.

This is Macaulay's favourite device. It does not lend itself to a sympathetic treatment or to a true statement. It makes the reader feel superior in a collection of monsters and paradoxes. Hear him on the poem of Lucretius and the philosophy of Epicurus :—

" The finest poem in the Latin language, indeed the finest didactic poem in any language, was written in defence of the silliest and meanest system of natural and moral philosophy."

Or on Johnson's mind :—

" The characteristic peculiarity of his intellect was the union of great powers with low prejudices. . . . No man was less likely to be imposed upon by fallacies in argument or by exaggerated

statements of fact. But if, while he was beating down sophisms and exposing false testimony, some childish prejudices, such as would excite laughter in a well-managed nursery, came across him, he was smitten as if by enchantment. His mind dwindled away under the spell from gigantic elevation to dwarfish littleness."

In conclusion, Macaulay compares him to the Genie in the *Arabian Nights*. What he aims at is not an understanding of Johnson, but the excitement and marvel of a fairy tale.

The formal instrument, Macaulay's prose, has all these qualities of clearness, emphasis, vividness, surprise. His short, sharp, dogmatic sentences come one after another like the rattle of musketry. He is not afraid of repetition to drive a point home. The reader is not allowed to find out anything for himself, or even to go halves with the author in a discovery. He is battered about the head and stunned into assent, fatigued and exhausted by the monotony of emphasis, the violence of ready-made judgments. Nothing in the *History* happens quietly. No judgment in the *Essays* allows of qualifications ; which, when they are introduced, are introduced only to be murdered.

Take any great master of English prose who is

also a great thinker—say Hooker or Bacon—and observe with what difficulty and after what struggles he reaches his conclusions. He tries to conceive, and to build into his sentences, all the objections and qualifications that may occur to the mind. He does not desire to achieve clearness and decision by neglecting whole aspects of his subject. He battles, like a swimmer, among the waves of adverse opinions, and is thankful to come to any conclusion at all. It is the greatness of a writer like Hooker that he reaches his goal, even though he has been passionately careful to do no injustice to any whom he meets by the way.

Macaulay's method in controversy is more summary, and his arguments are a long succession of easy triumphs. He presents his views so that they seem obvious, and the views of others so that they seem absurd. This is a wonderful power in a controversialist— to carry, for the time, at least, immediate and overwhelming conviction ; so that Macaulay more than any other author has formed the style of modern journalists and periodical writers. Where so many are in his debt, and have learned from him the trick of clearness and decision, it would be tedious to collect examples ; but perhaps I may be allowed to give one or two.

There is the method of delusive analogy. A question is difficult, complicated, obscure. Find a much simpler question, like the first in some respects, where all men accept a certain conclusion. Then apply it, until men rub their eyes, and wonder what these obscurities were which troubled them so long. This (to name no other) is a favourite device of Mr G. K. Chesterton, and it was a favourite with Macaulay.

I cite from his *Gladstone on Church and State* :—

" The question is not whether spiritual interests be or be not superior in importance to temporal interests ; but whether the machinery which happens at any moment to be employed for the purpose of protecting certain temporal interests of a society be necessarily such a machinery as is fitted to promote the spiritual interests of that society."

This is a fair statement. But the illustrations which follow simplify and falsify the issue :—

" It is of very much more importance that men should have food than that they should have pianofortes. Yet it by no means follows that every pianoforte maker ought to add the business of a baker to his own ; for, if he did so, we should have both much worse music, and much worse bread. It is of much more importance that the knowledge of religious truth should be wisely

diffused than that the art of sculpture should flourish among us. Yet it by no means follows that the Royal Academy ought to unite with its present functions those of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge."

No one maintains these things. The cases are not the same. No one who thinks on the question—What ought to be the attitude of government to religion?—will be helped by these parallels. Yet for the moment they seem convincing and persuasive.

The same gift of persuasion and emphasis has been learned from Macaulay by a host of humbler disciples. Some of the most effective writing of our day is to be found in the better sort of advertisements; and the style of these advertisements is very exactly borrowed from Macaulay. The skilful pen that deposited two hundredweight of *Encyclopædia Britannica* in thousands of houses ill able to contain it, learned its craft from Macaulay. Here (lest I be accused of exaggeration) is an example of the style:—

"The Life of Johnson is assuredly a great, a very great work. Homer is not more decidedly the first of heroic poets, Shakespeare is not more decidedly the first of dramatists, Demosthenes is not more decidedly the first of orators, than Boswell is the first of biographers. He has no

second. He has distanced all his competitors so decidedly that it is not worth while to place them. Eclipse is first, and the rest nowhere."

Note the merits of advertisement—simple main point, repetition, emphasis, persuasion.

If we deny to Macaulay (as I should be inclined to deny to him) a place among our greatest prose writers, it is not because he lacks great gifts, but because for a prose writer, whether essayist or historian, one gift is greater than all the rest. The gift of imagination, as even his admirers confess, was " not his strongest point."

It is important to define this, for Macaulay's imagination is certainly pictorial and vivid to a very remarkable degree. But it is not creative imagination ; it has not the fusing and compelling power which imposes unity on every subject that it handles. Such an imagination does not collect details to decorate a given framework ; it *melts* its material into a single whole. Macaulay had not this imagination. His minute and tenacious memory was against him, by presenting him with plentiful material, ready-made. His love of picture and movement was against him, by causing him to be satisfied with glitter and effectiveness even where they obscure the true significance of the theme. And it

would not be difficult, I think, to show that his most admired and glowing sketches do not glow with life.

It is one of the oldest rules of composition (or principles of criticism) that every sentence, every paragraph, every chapter, every book, should have a centre of interest, a single point out of which everything else radiates or grows. Everything else leads up to this centre, is subordinated to it, has no value save in relation to this centre. This is not an artificial law imposed by the books of rhetoric ; it is the law of the eye and the mind. Every good picture observes it. The portrait painter would have " indicated " the Alderman's gold chain of office. " You will not indicate it," said the Alderman, " you will paint it."

Macaulay sometimes loses unity by following this plan ; he does not indicate his details, he paints them. His memory supplies him with facts for which no room can be found without blurring the main impression, yet he forces them into the picture.

Take the well-known passage on the Trial of Warren Hastings :—" The charges and the answers of Hastings were first read. The ceremony occupied two whole days, and was rendered less tedious than it would otherwise have been by the silver voice and just emphasis of

Cowper, the clerk of the court, a near relation of the amiable poet. On the third day Burke rose. . . . The energy and pathos of the great orator extorted expressions of unwonted admiration from the stern and hostile Chancellor, and, for a moment, seemed to pierce even the resolute heart of the defendant. The ladies in the galleries, unaccustomed to such displays of eloquence, excited by the solemnity of the occasion, and perhaps not unwilling to display their taste and sensibility, were in a state of uncontrollable emotion. Handkerchiefs were pulled out; smelling-bottles were handed round; hysterical sobs and screams were heard; and Mrs Sheridan was carried out in a fit. At length the orator concluded. Raising his voice till the old arches of Irish oak resounded, 'Therefore,' said he, 'hath it with all confidence been ordered,' etc., etc."

Now all this is the sort of thing that would be noticed by the descriptive reporter, whose idle, wandering eye picks up any striking detail. It is a kind of echo of the remarks of casual spectators. "What a sweet voice the clerk of the court has!" "He's a cousin of William Cowper the poet." "Look at the roof; they say it is all made of old Irish oak." But if Macaulay had had the imaginative fire and grasp to seize the whole situation and present it to us from the point of

view of Warren Hastings himself, or of Burke, or of the Judges in the cause, there would have been no room for the old Irish oak. Burke did not care for the history of the rafters ; Hastings did not care for it ; but it was known to Macaulay, and he introduces it to keep alive the interest of the gaping spectator.

Does not this extract furnish a good explanation and summary of the causes and limitations of Macaulay's influence ? To those who are already deeply interested in the matters that he describes he has never appealed with any force. He is too fluent and superficial. They have never cared for him, and they never will. But the new-comer to a subject, who is glad to have his attention awakened now by this touch of interest, now by that, here by an anecdote, there by an ingenious comparison, all in a manner so clear and easy that even the idlest listener is compelled to understand, will find Macaulay a matchless guide among the tombs of dead writers and statesmen. And not a few, perhaps, who dissent from Macaulay's conclusions in any of his themes would have to confess that it was Macaulay himself who first roused them to take an interest in that theme, and stimulated them to the labours which have enabled them to supplement or to refute him.

V

ON THE DECLINE AND FALL OF ROMANTICISM IN 19TH-CENTURY POETRY

THE main business of a literary historian of the 19th century is to trace the after effects or the decline and fall of Romanticism, to show how enthusiasm and knowledge were divorced, and to trace the results of that divorce.

The generations of men are habitually unjust to their immediate forerunners. It is a wise child that recognises the merits of its own father, and remembers that he too marched in the van of progress as a rebel to authority and a representative of the new order. But a child only moderately wise is often found able to see some good in its grandfather. Sympathy, like heredity, often skips a generation. We ought to be able by this time to regard the men of the 18th century with impartial minds. Their immediate successors could not.

The earlier part of the 19th century was noisy with abuse of the 18th. Every one was at liberty

to call it names, and there was none to contradict. The century was reviled as dull, narrow, coldly analytic, minutely critical, destitute of enthusiasm and of poetry, the enemy to imagination, the mother of dead dogs. To listen to the more fervent of the early Romantics you might suppose, indeed, that the 18th century was a period of wilful blindness and servitude, a long captivity of all the higher faculties of man, and that by the energies of the 19th century the losses of this period were made good, and its work undone and effaced. But it was not so.

> Nothing can be as it has been before;
> Better, so call it, only not the same.

The great achievements, the heroic part (one might almost say) of the work of the 18th century remained, and helped to fashion even the poetry of the succeeding age. For all its sceptical tendencies the 18th century had a creed. It believed in human reason—a weak and uncertain instrument, no doubt, yet the best available for the discovery of truth. It believed in civilisation and the capacity of man for progress. The humanitarian ideals which have left so deep a mark on our own time had their origins in the 18th century. The 18th century is a long story of persistent and patient effort to bring all things to the exactest possible test of thought.

The poets might revile the sceptics and questioners, but the fabric of modern science, philosophy and history was founded on their critical labours.

It was the work of the 18th century to further free inquiry, to redeem men from nameless fears, and to teach the duty of man to his fellows. But the zeal of the scientific spirit outran modesty. A "philosopher" in the 18th century was a man who believed everything to be explicable, and who attempted to explain the most complex and difficult phenomena of human life by a rough-and-ready appeal to physical causes. Montesquieu attributed the various political institutions and customs of mankind to the influence of various climates, just as Thomas Henry Buckle (a true child of the 18th century) much later attributed them to the variety of human diet. Gibbon, in his famous chapters on Christianity, attempted to explain the rise and influence of Christianity by a conjunction of purely natural and historical causes. And lesser men than these carried the generalising and rationalising process much further. We have seen in our own day the doctrine of evolution used as a key to all the mysteries. In the 18th century the sciences of biology and physi-

ology were still in their infancy, but the more exact physical sciences were appealed to in the same way. The healthy spirit of scepticism and research gave way to dogmatism. "Man's customs and habits and beliefs depend on his nature, his nature is conditioned by his body, his body is composed of matter, and the laws of matter are known." That is not an unfair statement of the views of many of the "Encyclopædists" whose work gave its character to the thought of the later 18th century, and helped on the French Revolution. It was this arid and inadequate account of man that provoked the counter-movement and gave force to the Romantic Revival: when

> Like a man in wrath
> The heart stood up and answered, "I have felt."

The French Revolution strengthened in some respects this tyranny of rationalism. The English books that embody the revolutionary temper are books like the *Political Justice* of William Godwin, who attempts to regulate all the most human feelings by the clockwork of the intellect, and seriously maintains that it is wrong to love your father better than other men, unless you can prove that your father is better than other men; or like the *Age of Reason* by

Tom Paine, of whom Sir Leslie Stephen justly remarks that " his ignorance was vast, and his language brutal." So far from being a reaction against 18th-century philosophy, the Revolution was the outcome of that philosophy, and developed its doctrines almost to the pitch of parody.

The narrowness and self-sufficiency of the scientific and philosophic ideas of the later 18th century provoked many passionate protests. It was the " philosophy " of that century which Wordsworth was thinking of when, writing before the century closed, he addressed the imagined chance visitors to the grave of a poet :—

> Physician art thou ?—one, all eyes,
> Philosopher !—a fingering slave,
> One that would peep and botanise
> Upon his mother's grave ?
>
> Wrapt closely in thy sensual fleece
> O turn aside,—and take, I pray,
> That he below may rest in peace,
> Thy ever-dwindling soul away !
>
> A Moralist perchance appears ;
> Led, Heaven knows how ! to this poor sod :
> And he has neither eyes nor ears ;
> Himself his world, and his own God ;
>
> One to whose smooth-rubbed soul can cling
> Nor form, nor feeling, great or small ;
> A reasoning, self-sufficing thing,
> An intellectual All-in-all !

> Shut close the door; press down the latch;
> Sleep in thy intellectual crust;
> Nor lose ten tickings of thy watch
> Near this unprofitable dust!

It was the philosophers, moralists and statists of the 18th century that Burke, writing some years before Wordsworth, cried out against in horror and indignation:—

"But now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions which made power gentle and obedience liberal . . . are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked, shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion. On this scheme of things, a King is but a man, a Queen is but a woman, a woman is but an animal,—and an animal not of the highest order. All homage paid to the sex in general as such, and without distinct views, is to be regarded as romance and folly. . . . . On the scheme of this barbarous philosophy, which is the offspring of cold hearts and muddy understandings, and which is as

void of solid wisdom as it is destitute of all taste and elegance, laws are to be supported only by their own terrors, and by the concern which each individual may find in them from his own private speculations, or can spare to them from his own private interests. In the groves of *their* academy, at the end of every visto, you see nothing but the gallows."

These are two eloquent protests against the tyranny of 18th century rationalism, both of them uttered in the last decade of the century. They are a protest made on behalf of poetry, a poetry of life, against the tyranny of a partial science. And the protest grew in volume and strength with the growth of the new Romantic school, until new fashions in politics and literature supplanted the old.

One confession must be made. Whatever other work the 18th century may have done in England it had done little for poetry. Almost all the most notable poems of the age belong to what may be called the "outlying provinces" of poetry, not to its centre and core. There are argumentative poems in plenty, like the *Essay on Man;* satirical poems, from Pope's to Churchill's; didactic poems, like *The Vanity of Human Wishes;* descriptive poems, like Thomson's *Seasons.* But if you say

that Poetry itself is argumentative, satirical, didactic, and descriptive, you have mentioned four qualities which are conspicuous by their absence in many, perhaps most, of the best poems. Long before the 18th century closed the sense of something lacking in the poetry of the age had been expressed by the most sensitive spirits. Gray laments the past glories of English literature :—

> But not to one in this benighted age
> Is that diviner inspiration giv'n,
> That burns in Shakespeare's or in Milton's page,
> The pomp and prodigality of Heav'n.

Cowper complains that the very art of verse has become a dull routine easily learned and slavishly practised by the pupils of Pope :—

> But he (his musical finesse was such,
> So nice his ear, so delicate his touch)
> Made poetry a mere mechanic art,
> And ev'ry warbler has his tune by heart.

And William Blake, at the very beginning of his career, invoked the ancient Muses and upbraided them for their desertion of poetry :—

> Whether on Ida's shady brow,
> Or in the chambers of the East,
> The chambers of the Sun, that now
> From ancient melody have ceas'd ;

Whether in Heaven ye wander fair,
Or the green corners of the Earth,
Or the blue regions of the Air
Where the melodious winds have birth;

Whether on chrystal rocks ye rove,
Beneath the bosom of the Sea,
Wand'ring in many a coral grove,
Fair Nine, forsaking Poetry!

How have you left the ancient love
That bards of old enjoy'd in you!
The languid strings do scarcely move!
The sound is forc'd, the notes are few!

The spirit of poetry was certainly in exile or in thraldom. It is perhaps not without significance that three of the best lyrical poets of the 18th century — Christopher Smart, William Collins, and William Cowper — were at some periods of their lives insane, and that the sanity of a fourth—William Blake—is still by some called in question.

The poets of the early 19th century were disaffected to the age they lived in. They found little in the life around them to engage their sympathy. The Greeks poets, the Elizabethan poets, had been content to be citizens of their own age, and to express the aspirations and the pride of their own people. But the Romantic poets were rebels and exiles, aloof from their own people, seeking support and comfort in other countries or

in bygone ages. Most of them were Revivalists, resuscitators of the past. Shelley stands alone as a true child of the Revolution, and escaped from the present in the other direction.

The great literature of England up to the beginning of the 19th century had flourished in towns and societies. But the Romantic poets foreswore the town and human society. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey established themselves in the hills of Somersetshire or in the Lakes, and shunned the converse of their fellows. Shelley, Byron and Landor naturalised themselves in Italy. All exemplify the doctrine of Emerson :—

> Men consort in camp and town
> But the poet dwells alone.

One need not explore far into the works of the Romantics to find them definitely attributing the dullness and indifference of the age to the labours and discoveries of science. Cowper is so unhappy as to pour ridicule on the industrious geologist for attempting to reopen a question authoritatively settled in the Book of Genesis :—

> Some drill and bore
> The solid earth, and from the strata there
> Extract a register, by which we learn
> That he who made it, and reveal'd its date
> To Moses, was mistaken in its age.

Keats formulates his charge against philosophy, or, as we should call it, science.

> Do not all charms fly
> At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
> There was an awful rainbow once in heaven;
> We knew her woof, her texture; she is given
> In the dull catalogue of common things.
> Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
> Conquer all mysteries by rule and line;
> Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine,
> Unweave a rainbow, as it erstwhile made
> The tender-person'd Lamia melt into the shade.

I do not wish to spend time on dealing with this as argument; I record it as feeling. Keats blasphemes science because it has taken from us the Naiads and Dryads, and Lamia the snake-woman. It has been replied, quite truly, that an oak tree or a running spring are as beautiful as ever they were, though we no longer embody their beauties in some imagined divinity; that the sea is as grand and mysterious as it was to the believers in the realm of Proteus and Triton. Moreover, it may be added that the abolition of these deities is a deliverance from the terrors that waylaid primitive man at every step. Wordsworth, who stands apart in many things from his contemporaries, normally recognised this. He would rather be a Pagan, he says, than

indifferent to Nature's beauties. But he would still rather see things as they are.

The supernatural expelled by science took a new lease of life in the work of the poets. But they had to pay the price of this great gain in a certain loss of touch with reality. Science is not to be denied. Scientific theories and conclusions may be shown to be false, but if they are not false, a man shuts his eyes to them at his own peril. The wave breaks and recedes, but the tide still comes in, in spite of King Canute. The Romantic poets could not really stay the tide, or jump off their own shadows.

Poets are more susceptible than others to ideas "in the air." Their poetry is not determined by these, but it has to make its peace with them. The poetry of the 19th century had to deal with a new factor in history, the rise of modern democracy (for power of intellect cannot be guaranteed in a selected caste) and of modern industrialism (for science sooner or later finds its applications). The finest record of single-heartedness, of persistent skill and courage, that the century supplies, is to be found in the story of the advancement of Science. The men who led and supported the advance are the real pioneers and champions of the century. Their

work was so surprising and novel that Poetry (if I may put it so) lost its balance and oscillated between the extremes of hope and fear. Some poets fell into dejection lest Science should rob them of all they held dear. Some, like Shelley, took Science as a new warrant for boundless faith and for a golden age in the future. Both were too apt to forget that Poetry has an indestructible possession :—

> What will be for ever,
> What was from of old.

Life and death, human striving and zest, are not outworn experiences, and though unalterable, are never commonplace. There is as much scope for courage and joy and faith as ever there was, though the goal of effort and the names given to faith change from age to age.

In their revival of the beliefs of other ages, the Romantic poets attain, for all the beauty of their poetry, only to make-believe. They are fanciers, not believers. I do not say that good make-believe is not sometimes good poetry. The majesty of Milton's Satan—the truth, one might say, of the portrayal—is eternal, and quite independent of all changes of theological belief. Yet Milton believed that his poem gave a true account, an account true in fact, of the system of the Universe. He would not have spent

twenty years in adorning a cunningly devised fable. The poets of the Romantic era were less simple, less whole-hearted.

Poetry, of course, is an escape from the grinding realities of life, as well as an interpretation of them. There are many provinces in that kingdom. There is *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, and there is *King Lear*. An old or mythical framework may be used as a setting for the expression of profound and inalterable truths—*is* so used, commonly, since the Renaissance. Shelley's *Adonais*, Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, are poems that grapple close with ultimate realities and are full of interpretation of life. But the literature of the Romantic age showed a marked preference for themes that fell outside the realm of daily belief. It displayed an almost dangerous indifference to the conquests of Science. It sought less to interpret the world than to escape from it.

There was a profound alienation, then, between poetry and science, such as there had not been in other great poetic ages. Knowledge had attempted to imprison and deform the imagination, and the imagination in revenge turned away from knowledge to dreams and decorations. The faith of an earlier age could not be recaptured,

so that Romance in its turn became incredulous, sceptical, playful—in a word, *æsthetic*. Poetry came to be regarded not as a prophetic and impassioned reading of life, but as one of the Fine Arts, falling into its place beside music and painting. Wordsworth comments on "the disgusting frequency with which the word *artistical*, imported with other impertinences from the German," was employed by the writers of his day.

This indulgence of æsthetic emotion was accompanied by a deep underlying melancholy. The poet seeks escape in the world of art, but he cannot forget the world of reality. His delights are a palliation of the woes that besiege him. A note of almost hopeless melancholy is heard in most of the Romantic poetry of the early 19th century.

"Three small volumes of verse, some earnest friendships, one profound passion, and a premature death"—these, says Lord Houghton, make up the story of Keats. This sounds like a minor poet. It does not sufficiently explain another verdict: "If one English poet might be recalled to-day from the dead to continue the work which he left unfinished on earth, it is probable that the crown of his country's desire would be set on the head

of John Keats" (Bridges). I think this is true. A minor poet is a poet who, if there had been no poetry in the world, would have been nothing. But Keats was not exclusively devoted to his art. He was among the great *prosaic* poets. He loved adventure, and travel, and jests, and hardship, and wine, and the air of winter. It is, therefore, an injustice of fate that made Keats the parent of the "Æsthetic School" in poetry. But there is no doubt of it. Keats is responsible (so far as anyone is besides their authors) for the *Blessed Damozel*, the *Idle Singer of an Empty Day*, the *Briar Rose*.

The romantic apotheosis of individual feeling, this impatience of the discipline of fact, was carried to greater extremes by the next generation. Feeling became sentiment; which I take to be feeling for its own sake, feeling reckless of all but itself. As a modern Romantic has said:—

> Love of the world with the years increases,
> Beauty of women and strength of men,
> But to dream my dream for an hour again
> I'd smash the world in ten million pieces.

That is, in brief epitome, the Romantic attitude. Keats had said that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," and the saying is a rounded and balanced whole. But many of the Romantics

took the first half only of the saying for their creed, and were content to set up as their standard in poetry and life the glimpses of beauty that had visited them in dreams. The later Romantics inherited the weakness rather than the strength of the early time, and sentiment passed into sentimentalism as easily and naturally as drinking for its own sake may pass into drunkenness.

The best instance of this exaggerated sentiment is to be found in that school of ultra-romantic poets who were nicknamed the *Spasmodics*. They have great wealth of language and richness of imagery. Their special mark, indeed, is their imagery. It is always vivid, gigantesque, exciting, surprising. But it does not elucidate the original theme: it obliterates it. What Dr Johnson says of the metaphysical poets is so far true of the Spasmodics: "... What they wanted of the sublime they endeavoured to supply by hyperbole; ... they left not only reason but fancy behind them, and produced combinations of confused magnificence that not only could not be credited, but could not be imagined."

The "Spasmodics," like the writers of "Heroic" plays in Dryden's time, generated from the corruption of Romance. What they have in common—I think of Philip James

Bailey, Sydney Dobell, Alexander Smith—is an almost complete lack of reverence for fact.

All lovers of language must be lovers of Tennyson. The great poems of Tennyson's earlier time—such poems as *The Day Dream*, *St Agnes' Eve*, *Will Waterproof*, *Ulysses*, *Morte d'Arthur*, *Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere*—are simple, direct, and whole-hearted ; they have the strength and the vision of poetry. But where the malady of the age, the malady of half-belief, of mental struggle, irresolution and divided counsels touched the poet, his work lost this strength and outline. *In Memoriam* is full of wonders and beauties, but in effect it is a long indecisive contest between faith and doubt, neither of them strong enough to gain the victory, nor resolute enough to die fighting.

The whole matter has been stated in a splendid piece of criticism by Swinburne :—

"Nothing in verse or out of verse is more wearisome than the delivery of reluctant doubt, of half-hearted hope and half-incredulous faith. A man who suffers from the strong desire either to believe or disbelieve something he cannot, may be worthy of sympathy, is certainly worthy of pity, until he begins to speak ; and if he tries to speak in verse, he misuses the implement

of an artist. . . . Nothing which leaves us depressed is a true work of art. We must have light though it be lightning, and air though it be storm."

These words were written by way of criticism on some of the poems of Matthew Arnold. But they apply almost equally to Tennyson, for indeed the malady I have spoken of was epidemic.

The preface to *The Earthly Paradise* summarises the tendencies of Romantic poetry :—

> Of Heaven or Hell I have no power to sing,
> I cannot ease the burden of your fears,
> Or make quick-coming death a little thing,
> Or bring again the pleasure of past years,
> Nor for my words shall ye forget your tears,
> Or hope again for aught that I can say,
> The idle singer of an empty day.
>
> . . .
>
> Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,
> Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?
> Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme
> Beats with light wing against the ivory gate,
> Telling a tale not too importunate
> To those who in the sleepy region stay,
> Lulled by the singer of an empty day.
>
> Folk say, a wizard to a northern king
> At Christmas-tide such wondrous things did show,
> That through one window men beheld the Spring,
> And through another saw the Summer glow,
> And through a third the fruited vines arow,
> While still, unheard, but in its wonted way,
> Piped the drear wind of that December day.

So with this Earthly Paradise it is,
If ye will read aright, and pardon me,
Who strive to build a shadowy isle of bliss
Midmost the beating of the steely sea,
Where tossed about all hearts of men must be;
Whose ravening monsters mighty men shall slay,
Not the poor singer of an empty day.

I know no poem that expresses better than this the weaker side of the Romantic movement in all its phases. Decadent Romantic art can live only in the twilight of an artificial Paradise. "The visitor to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition," said Mr D. S. MacColl, in words which, without straining, may be applied to the poetry of the æsthetic school, "would find there plenty of emotion, but . . . . instead of a *public* emotion, he would find a feeling of an intensely private order. Instead of pride, dignity, cheerful self-possession, lusty vigour, heroic force, instead of the public virtues aimed at wherever men are associated and drilled together, formed into armies and other institutions by the beliefs and claims of the State, he would find in the work of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Mr Morris, Mr Crane, and other followers of Rossetti, the emotions of the recluse, the fugitive, the pilgrim, the mystic, the rebel—an art inspired by wistfulness, yearning, disappointment, melancholy; the desire to avoid, to escape, to sleep, to die."

The individualism of the Romantic movement reached its climax and its suicide in the work of this school. The hope of the future, wherever it may lie, does not lie here.

Browning's life, like Tennyson's, almost covers the century. How was he affected by it? In truth, hardly at all. He has only one interest and one subject, for all his searching and wide intelligence. As he says in the Dedication of *Sordello*: "My stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul; little else is worth study."

An idealism like this is not liable to the melancholy of the Romantics; the harsh, cruel, tyrannic world becomes an illusion:—

> Thou and God exist,
> So think! for certain: think the mass—mankind—
> Disparts, disperses, leaves thyself alone!
> Ask thy lone soul what laws are plain to thee,
> Thee and no other, stand or fall by them!
> That is the part for thee: regard all else
> For what it may be—Time's illusion.

The scientific or statistical view of man, the conception of tyrannical environment, puffs out before this philosophy.

> In the seeing soul all worth lies, I assert,
> And nought i' the world.

The soul in its intensity and vitality is so real to Browning that the world fades into a shadow.

Thus there is in his poetry no patient and loving study of external "Nature" for its own sake; the life of man is such a crowded and passionate drama that attention can hardly be spared from it. For the same reason it is the life of towns and societies that attracts him, and gives him the themes of his poetry.

Round us the wild creatures, overhead the trees,
Underfoot the moss-tracks,—life and love with these!
I to wear a fawn-skin, thou to dress in flowers:
All the long lone summer-day, that greenwood life of ours!

The Reply:—

So, for us no world? Let throngs press thee to me!
Up and down amid men, heart by heart fare we!
Welcome squalid vesture, harsh voice, hateful face!
God is soul, souls I and thou: with souls should souls have place.

Browning lays all his stress on those emotional crises, those supreme moments of passionate feeling, which illuminate the world in a flash. Indeed, the whole world seems to him an elaborate machinery for producing this occasional spark.

To enumerate these clear, dramatic moments as they are described in Browning's poems would be to make a concordance of his works.

Browning is often grotesque and hurried, and is careless for the most part of the severe

beauties of classic art. His ideal is quite unlike Milton's:—

> And may at last my weary age
> Find out the peaceful hermitage,
> The hairy gown and mossy cell,
> Where I may sit and rightly spell
> Of every star that Heaven doth shew,
> And every herb that sips the dew;
> Till old experience do attain
> To something like prophetic strain.

There is hardly room in Browning's scheme for " old experience " ; he is the poet of the throbbing nerve and the tense muscle; and he died with a passionate reassertion of his creed :—

> Speed, fight on, fare ever
> There as here!

The last printed symbol in his published work is a mark of exclamation, the last utterance a cry of battle.

His work quickened the life of two generations ; it has been a delight and a tonic, but it has not escaped criticism. Santayana, in " The Poetry of Barbarism," complains that Browning leaves no room for the higher work of reason. " The passion he represents is lava hot from the crater, in no way moulded, smelted or refined. He had no thought of subjugating impulses into the harmony of reason." Had he seen the world

through the intellect, " he would not have been able to cry ' How the world is made for each one of us ! ' On the contrary, the ' Soul ' would have figured only in its true conditions, in all its ignorance and dependence, and also in its essential teachableness, a point against which Browning's barbaric wilfulness particularly rebelled. Rooted in his persuasion that the soul is essentially omnipotent, and that to live hard can never be to live wrong, he remained fascinated by the march and method of self-consciousness, and never allowed himself to be weaned from that romantic fatuity by the energy of rational imagination."

" Barbarism " is a hard word, but the criticism is valuable. Tennyson struggled with the problems suggested by modern thought and modern science. To Browning these problems gave no trouble. He is preoccupied by his own intense sensations :—

How good is man's life, the mere living ! How fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy !

If objections are urged he replies :—

All I can say is—I saw it,
All I can sing is—I feel it.

He is the poet of zest and energy rather than of order. Every one must have experienced moments of exaltation, when the weight of the world was lifted, and the old woes of the world seemed far and faint. Browning helps us to increase the number of these moments, and to recall them when they are past. But he does not give any profound expression to the great compelling forces of Nature, for in the progress of the self-confident soul these forces give but renewed and welcome opportunity for the delights of battle.

Browning, in a sense, is the most triumphant and assured of the Romantics. He deals, at great length, and in many poems, with the problem which during the century had exercised poets and biologists, philosophers and divines, the problem of "Man's place in Nature." But he refuses, perhaps more absolutely than any of them, to allow value or meaning to Nature apart from her relation to the soul of Man. Nature is for him the halo round man's head, emanating from that head, or the raw, confused material which is woven by the human spirit into striking patterns, or an array of obstacles and difficulties which give to the human soul an opportunity for renewed effort and reiterated self-assertion.

It would be absurd to call this view untrue.

Any poet who writes sincerely from his heart and mind writes a part of the truth. But it would not be absurd to say that Browning is only very partially in sympathy with those who study Nature for her own sake, prepared to undergo her discipline, and to accept in quiet what lessons she teaches. His poetry, in some of its aspects, is an escape from thought.

The chief moral value of Browning's poetry is that it supplements and transcends systems. If it were reduced to a system itself, some new Browning would be needed to supply its deficiencies.

In our later notable verse I seem to find a fuller recognition of "Nature, Society, and the other ideals of reason" than in any of the full-blown Romantics. The older Romantic poets celebrated the individual soul. Their successors have more to say of society and the great forces that surround man. The older Romantics taught rebellion: the later poets—Meredith, Kipling, Henley, Housman—celebrate Law.

Meredith perhaps stands foremost of the poets of his time in his glad acceptance of all truth, however startling, and in his reassertion of the worthiness and dignity of human life under the law. His poetry (of which the first volume was

published in 1851) contains in condensed form most of the wisdom and reflection that reappears in his novels.

His subjects are mainly two—The Joy of Earth, and Tragic Life. He faces the mysteries of the one, and finds consolation in the other. What the Romantics called " Nature " he prefers to call " Earth." " Nature," after a century of Romanticism, has an indescribable flavour of ease-loving sentiment about it ; " Earth " is our home, our nourisher, our battle-field, our grave, the stuff of which even our dreams are made. The gracious high abstraction to whom was committed the education of Wordsworth's Lucy —Nature, conceived in her calmer and more benignant aspects—has come closer to us and become more actual in the character of Earth. The scientific conception of the Earth as a biological battle-field, a struggle where the strong triumphs and the weak is ruthlessly crushed, has sometimes been quoted—inappositely, I think—against Wordsworth. Meredith, at any rate, does not fear it.

It is small wonder that Meredith has no liking for the attitude of the early Romantics, no sympathy for their alienation from society and rebellion against order. He calls Byron's Manfred a

"clatterjaw" who climbed the Alps in a nightmare without shedding a drop of honest perspiration. Victor Hugo's Hernani pleases him hardly better. In both he finds the work of "that distempered devil of Self," which covets permanence for sensual satisfactions, and cries out at the discipline of life. The only consolation which Meredith has for the poet who makes war on society is the consolation he offers to the hunted fox :—

Wild, my poor friend, has the fate to be chased.

Meredith is a poet whose inspiration comes from order, measure, law—from all that the Romantic poets, or most of them, made war on.

It is a good practical test : "Are you angry, count a hundred." Meredith has another : "Are you angry—try to put your anger into a sonnet, express it in a song." If it is a righteous and high anger it will make a good lyric. If it has anything small or mean or selfish about it, its deformity will at once be made apparent. Poetry will have nothing to say to it.

VI

A NOTE ON CRITICISM

The habit of treating Criticism as a distinct branch of literature has made great inroads. We hear of the philosophy of Criticism, the history of Criticism. The older purpose of the study of Criticism was to give us canons of judgment: What ought we to like? What have most people liked and why? But we do not treat our friends or acquaintance so: "Whom ought we to like?" "Who are the best people?" When a real book finds a real reader half the questions of criticism vanish. Appetite justifies itself. No one who is really hungry asks, "What ought I to like?" No one who laughs asks, "Ought I to be amused?"

There is much talk to-day [1910-11] about Criticism as a science and an art. Most of this talk, even when professional critics are the speakers, is deeply imbued with scepticism. Mr Saintsbury's three stout volumes on the History of Criticism are a prolonged assault on all systems, rules,

standards, and principles. Professor Spingarn of Columbia University, in a recent (Crocean) lecture called "The New Criticism," * sweeps almost all that critics have said and done into one capacious limbo: "We have done" with this and "we have done" with that. If Professor Spingarn is willing to add, "We have done with Criticism," I, for one, have no objection. And it is fair to him to say that he seems to have none. Criticism is not a thing apart; the abilities that it calls for are good for many purposes; it is literature suggested by a book.

Of course we have not done with critics. Nothing will ever prevent men liking and hating and judging one another, and the expression of those loves and hates will always be a lively thing.

This new freedom and antinomianism has been produced, without doubt, by the Romantic Revival. The process is not yet complete; the scepticism which refuses standards and axioms and laws seems to grow keener and deeper every day. There are some who lament this, but do they remember that in judging books they are judging human life and character—all that men desire and suffer and are? It is a good sign, and a vital sign, when humility is recognised as the

* Published in 1911.

first essential for this task, and when the conclusions attained are modest, and dubious, and few.

The multiplication of models, by introducing chaos, has quickened this catholic apprehension. The old dogmatic criticism, which recognised certain great works as the only perfect models, was a product of the grammar school ; a branch of pedagogy, not of poetry. Parents and masters are careful to keep children away from the frontiers of life, because the frontiers are dangerous ; but " out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, poetry." All the great literature of the world has been the attempting of something new. The novelty of the attempt was the motive and meaning of it. It cannot be understood by those who see in it only an established model, who feel nothing of the original excitement of the poet.

The New Criticism, or as I prefer to say, the modern attitude of intelligent readers to books is not, however, to be fully explained by literary influences and causes. It is one with the modern attitude of men to one another. What is it that chiefly distinguishes the nineteenth century from earlier centuries ? There are many answers —Science, Industrialism, Democracy. But I think they could all be summed up in a word

which expresses their effect on us—humanitarianism. I do not think that we love pleasure more than our ancestors, but we hate pain more. We are quicker to imagine suffering—physical suffering, at any rate. Our opinions concerning crime are undergoing a silent, slow, and vast revolution. The action and attitude of the criminal must, we think, have causes, and if it cannot be justified can at least be explained—if not reasonable, it can be made intelligible. We must know all the circumstances before we can judge the case. It is the doctrine of Burke for political problems, and of Burns for human weakness, and it has become more general and stronger since their day. It is a consequence, really, and an inevitable consequence of the scientific habit. Judge if you must, but before you judge try to understand.

I do not think I misstate or overstate the modern attitude; nor do I complain of it. I think it is a gain. No doubt humanitarianism may be a vice as well as a virtue. But where it is a vice, the cause is lack of heart (which is the brain feeling), and lack of brain (which, for all human purposes, is the heart thinking). There is a common brand of humanitarian who does his thinking not with his brain or heart, but with his nerves. I instance Mr Galsworthy and his

Justice. Sense of shock is what he contributes. Brought up in comfort, he confides to us his horror of the elements.

How does all this apply to the criticism of literature? Very closely. Poets come under the new treatment. We do not judge our poets; we diagnose their case. I find in myself, at least, one symptom of the modern feeling: I am very easily dissatisfied with censorious judgments on bad poetry. Miss Sichel has recently published an amusing essay on Bad Poetry*—yet I find in spite of myself that I cannot help seeing what the writers meant. Mrs Hemans, for example, on sunset in the Alps:—

Soft skies of Italy! how richly drest,
Smile these wild scenes in your purpureal glow!
What glorious hues, reflected from the west,
Float o'er the dwellings of eternal snow!

. . . . . .

Now from yon peak departs the vivid ray,
That still at eve its lofty temple knows;
From rock and torrent fade the tints away,
And all is wrapt in twilight's deep repose:
While through the pine-wood gleams the vesper-star,
And roves the Alpine gale o'er solitudes afar.

I catch the mood from these verses, and I see the picture. It is not great poetry, but why should we call it *Bad?* It does its humble job.

* "Some Suggestions about Bad Poetry," in *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, 1910.

Obscure verses have never been a dangerous engine of revolution. Boredom is the worst we can suffer, and for no longer than we choose. Those who declare war on bores and dunces are inspired by one or other of the universal motives of war—fear, self-aggrandisement, or sport. Pope feared the dunces more than he admits. Our tolerance should be extended, is extended, to those who make good sport of attacking poets. If a nimble critic can dance a hornpipe better on the tombstone of a poet than on any other surface, we do not forbid him to dance there. To him the poet is only a theme. What Laodamia was to Wordsworth, that Wordsworth was to Jeffrey—an opportunity for expressing some of his own convictions and beliefs.

I shall be accused, perhaps, of holding pure Pyrrhonism, but I wish to add one other consideration. Fashion is so powerful a tyrant, and its slaves are so unconscious of their servitude, that you constantly find the sentimentalists and pedants of one age laughing heartily at the sentimentalists and pedants of another. A little change in diction, the sprinkling of a handful of the dust of time, and our own sentiments and tastes seem absurd. The consideration, that sincere sentiments may often dress themselves in over-worn language, or in language

since become outworn, has the widest bearing on literary criticism. The elements, it is true, escape this danger; bread and wine are words good in every dialect. But a great deal of the stuff of literature is subject to wear of this kind. Ridicule is very quick to fasten on accidental differences; we can't, for example, help laughing at foreigners. It is the business of literary criticism, or rather, of those who have come to know and love some poets whose speech is not our speech, to overcome this obstacle, and to listen to them as if they belonged to our society. The danger of a criticism that founds itself upon intuitive taste is that it cannot well avoid this pitfall of accidental prejudice. Indeed, a very great part of literary criticism might be typified, if an emblem were wanted for it, by a picture of a lady in a hobble-skirt laughing at a lady in a crinoline.

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